

“And a little lookin’ out for the other fella, too” –

Individualism and the individual’s relation to society in Frank Capra’s

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Meet John

Doe and It’s a Wonderful Life

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Frank Capra is often said to be the “most American” of all Hollywood directors because of his persistent appraisal of American ideals and ideas like democracy, honesty, hard work, family life, integrity, individualism and more. He is often compared to American icons like author Horatio Alger and painter Norman Rockwell due to his similarly positive and optimistic understandings and representations of American society. Capra made films for nearly forty years, and achieved massive popularity and critical acclaim in the 1930s and 1940s. The cinema was the most important of the American mass media in the 20th century, and was without a doubt at the height of its popularity, influence and dominance at the time when the films discussed in this thesis paper were made and distributed, the 1930s and 1940s. American movies both reflected and influenced the way America and Americans were understood within, but also outside of, the USA. The films discussed and defined what their makers thought about American ideals, and remain documents of how American society has been reflected in its art. I have chosen to work with the films of director Frank Capra because of his fascinating portrayals of American society and values. The thematic focus of my thesis will be his portrayal of the notion of the individual and the individual’s relation to society. I will also focus on the relationship between biblical and republican individualism and utilitarian and expressive individualism in this regard. I choose this focus because individualism, throughout American history, has had immense ideological influence on the American society and its inhabitants.

Individualism in America

Although it was imported from Europe with some negative connotations, the term *individualism* acquired a positive meaning in the USA and was a new way of understanding the American past and the country's ideologies. In America, individualism came to denote an entire set of social ideals and exercise enormous ideological influence. These ideals were largely incompatible with the ideals of the collectivism, socialism and communism of the Old World. The term was first used in the early 19th century, by French counterrevolutionary critics of the Enlightenment. It was filled with some negative connotations, as French thinkers of the day thought individualism would undermine society and produce egotism and anarchy. Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the most influential social analysts of the 19th century, believed that Americans would be able to avoid these consequences only if they remained loyal to the free institutions and the tradition of active citizenship found within American society.¹

It is necessary to take a look at the historical conditions for the development of individualism. Historically, there are four major strains of American individualism: biblical, republican, utilitarian and expressive. Regarding the notion of the individual's relation to society, the philosophies of the biblical and republican strains are rather similar, and at the same time, they are very different from the philosophies of utilitarian and expressive individualism, which in turn have several important similarities. I therefore find it useful to discuss the two former strains as one group and the two latter strains as one group. The biblical

strain is perhaps more important than people today realize. Many of the earliest immigrants who arrived in America were strongly religious people, called Puritans, who believed that success was ultimately not a matter of material wealth, but a healthy community of truly ethical and spiritual inhabitants. They also embraced the idea of the supreme and intrinsic value of the individual human being. The most influential Puritan thinker and statesman was John Winthrop, who coined the phrase “city upon a hill,” one of many illustrations of the Utopian feeling that permeated their life in America. The Puritans’ moral perception of success also influenced the way they thought about freedom. The freedom to do whatever one pleases was denounced in favor of a “true” freedom, a “moral” freedom, which emphasized the relationship between God and man and was a liberty “to that only which is good, just and honest.” Their understanding of justice was focused more on substance rather than procedure. The republican strain is most typically embodied in Thomas Jefferson. He strongly emphasized the notion of political equality and believed that in order to make a republic function, all citizens must be involved in and participate in the governing of society. The principle that each man should be able to influence and control his existence was very important. Jefferson also concerned himself with the principle of freedom, but in a different way from Winthrop. He did not so explicitly link freedom to morality, but instead dwelled on freedom of religion, speech and press, and freedom from arbitrary governmental action. But both Winthrop and Jefferson denounced the idea of freedom as being allowed to do whatever one wants.²

Utilitarian individualism finds its roots in the legendary Benjamin Franklin. He clearly expressed what both contemporary and succeeding Americans have felt to be the essence of the American dream, which is the possibility for everyone to succeed or fail on his or her own initiative, and to be able to constantly improve one's own situation. This emphasis on success became the basis of Franklin's thinking about freedom and justice, and like Jefferson, he realized the importance of an egalitarian society of participation in order to secure the well-being of its citizens. However, many of Franklin's followers failed to understand the significance of this social perspective, and hence focused solely on the ideas of self-development and self-improvement. Thus utilitarian individualism emerged, which can be summarized in the thought that a society in which every individual vigorously pursues his or her own interests will automatically be blessed with a common social good. This way of life, with its constant focus on material growth and prosperity, became too restrained and too unfulfilling for a number of Americans as the 1800s progressed. Instead of searching for material wealth, a focus on, and cultivation of, the self became the ideal. The standard for a successful life was a life rich in subjective experience and intense sentiments and feelings. These thoughts formed the basis of expressive individualism. Its most classic exponents were Ralph Waldo Emerson, who believed that society was in direct opposition to the individual, and Walt Whitman, to whom individualism was more than anything else the freedom to express oneself.³

All the different strains discussed here influenced the American notion of individualism, which Tocqueville wrote elaborately about in his *Democracy in*

America. Then what constitutes this individualism? The term *self-reliance* is very prominent in American thinking. In the biblical and republican traditions, this term was firmly placed in a social, collective context, but this context virtually disappeared with utilitarian and expressive individualism. Ralph Waldo Emerson pointed out the essence of expressive individualistic self-reliance in the idea that we only deserve what we work for and that we are socially and economically responsible only for ourselves.⁴ This idea also involves the process of “leaving home,” which means that you must free yourself from reliance on your parents. You must become independent. This process is taught to American children generation after generation.⁵ To ensure the possibility for an individual to get along on his or her own, a lot of attention has been given to provide all citizens with equal rights and opportunities through fair laws and political procedures that are applied to everyone in the same way.

A positive consequence of self-reliance is that you get a nation of diligent, hard-working people, which in turn creates prosperity and material well-being. This, in turn, provides people with safety and security. America has always had a remarkably industrious workforce and has been the richest country in the world since the early 1900s. Another positive trait of self-reliance is that you are able to pursue abstract phenomena like self-fulfillment and self-realization, which leads to personal happiness and satisfaction. In the Old World, with its rigid class society and hierarchy, it was impossible to step out of the crowd and make something of yourself. You had to accept your place in life. In America, the object of life has always been to become all that you can, to become your own person, and to excel in

several ways. This helps you to create and find your own personal identity, and this self-awareness is often felt to be an important part of a satisfying existence.

On the negative side, if one forgets the social context of biblical and republican individualism, self-reliance has a tendency to isolate people from each other. If you do not feel any responsibility for other people, you may start neglecting them and grow egotistic and cynical. The main purpose in life may become the accumulation of wealth for your own benefit. You may stop caring about your community and fail to partake in the governing of society. In addition to making numbers of individuals lonely and personally unhappy, this consequence jeopardizes the foundation of active citizenship upon which the USA was founded. This is something Jefferson and Winthrop would have emphatically denounced, and is exactly what Tocqueville feared could happen and strongly warned against, and is one of the problems facing American society.⁶

Closely related to self-reliance is the notion of *autonomy*, which means the right of self-government and freedom of action. You can say what you want, you can believe what you want, and you can do what you want as long as you do not violate the rights and property of others. This is a highly regarded concept in American life. To Americans, however, freedom very often means freedom *from* something, for example from governmental actions and limitations, from restrictions, demands and expectations. What to do with this freedom remains uncertain to a large number of people.⁷ The principle is often more important than the substance. Autonomy also involves what is called self-direction, which means that the individual must critically evaluate the norms and standards with which he is

confronted and then independently reach practical and rational decisions. The most clearly positive thing about autonomy is that it enables a truly democratic society to thrive and develop. A society without freedom of the press, speech, religion and political beliefs can never be the people-oriented republic that Jefferson and his followers wanted to establish. Autonomy also provides people with initiative and creativity, and it has stimulated tolerance and respect for other people and their opinions.

The problems arise in the way people cope with this freedom. That Americans are more concerned with having freedom *from* than freedom *to* may weaken their ability to think and act constructively regarding the future of their nation.⁸ On a different note, autonomy is also partly responsible for the development of ethical and epistemological relativism, which has led to a kind of rootlessness. The objective absolutes of right and wrong and true and false have seemingly disappeared, and there is no longer any “wider framework” that determines a larger sense of the purpose of life. Ethical and moral questions become matters of technicality, subjective preference and practicality.⁹ This may lead to opportunism and selfishness. This is quite the opposite of what Winthrop, Jefferson and Franklin approved of. Besides leading to individuals’ actions that are wrong and/or sinful in themselves, this also poses a threat to the USA as a nation, since immoral, opportunistic citizens may take little interest in building and maintaining a country.

An idea of individualism relevant to this thesis discussion is the notion of the *artificial society*, which implies an understanding of society as merely responding to the various requirements of individuals. The rules, norms and institutions of

society are seen as artificial, constructed instruments serving the needs of the individuals. Another theory relevant in this context is *political individualism*, a doctrine which assumes that the grounds and sources of political authority can be found in the purposes of individuals, and that such authority is not derived from divine or natural law.¹⁰

American individualism also includes an idea called *religious individualism*. This means that the individual believer does not need intermediaries in one's religious life. One has the right and the (moral) duty to establish and nurture one's own personal relationship with God (or whatever supreme being or force one believes in), which means that this is both a religious doctrine and a view of the nature of religion. This idea implies that one has to make a personal decision what to believe in and what to do about that belief. The idea stems from the Puritans and their Protestant convictions, which were radically different from the collectivistic views of the Catholic Church around the time of the Reformation.¹¹

I agree with the authors of *Habits of the Heart* in that the healthiest forms of individualistic expression and lifestyle are represented by the biblical and republican strands of American society, as I too believe that over-indulgence in utilitarian and expressive individualism will eventually erode the basis of "the American project."¹² Emphasizing the elements of biblical and republican individualism and carefully exploring elements of utilitarian and expressive individualism thus seems to be the way to ensure the prevalence of American values and ideals. My intention in this thesis is to show that Capra and his movies argue in favor of biblical and republican individualism.

American cinema in the 1930s and the 1940s

It is necessary to take a look at the history of American cinema in order to understand the development of thematic content in and the popularity of Frank Capra's films. It is also necessary in order to understand why his dominance and popularity and his role as a social force declined after World War II. Even though many personal Hollywood fortunes were lost or diminished and some of the studios went into receivership for longer or shorter periods of time because of the depression, the 1930s proved to be a decade of both creative and financial wealth for American cinema. While the studios were not hit as hard as the rest of the country by the depression, their products had to respond to changes in popular taste, which seemed to have become darker and harder. A cycle of various films made in the early 30s illustrate this, such as *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, gangster films, films with "fallen" women, shady lawyers and cynical newspaper editors, horror films etc. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation in 1933 was to change this.

Colin Shindler claims that

[T]he Hollywood response to the Depression and the prospect of social revolution, particularly after 1933 when Roosevelt had restored some measure of economic and moral confidence, was basically twofold. On the one hand it emphasised the durability of certain American institutional and mythological traditions. On the other it suggested that the Depression was akin to a bout of influenza, something to be endured with good humour until it went away as swiftly and mysteriously as it had arrived. ... The American worship of the cult of individualism, the belief that anyone through honesty, perseverance and faith can achieve anything, is employed in both these remedies for the Depression as a means of defusing a potentially revolutionary situation.¹³

The rather naive "influenza" type was mainly prevalent from 1933-35. One of the first directors to emphasise individualism and American traditions intelligently and artistically was John Ford, both through his westerns and his dramas. In 1936, three

significant films that all served as pleas for individualism were made, Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Gregory La Cava's *My Man Godfrey* and Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. The latter was the first in a series of movies that would make Capra "the champion of the little man." Shindler points out that

[I]n the films of Frank Capra the two great fantasies of 1930s individualism are given their most impressive treatment. First, they exalted the dignity of the individual by emphasising his uniqueness as a person, the value of his friends and the rewards of his steadfastness. ... Second, they restored a sense of patriotism that the nation as a whole had left in abeyance in 1929. The Capra films were hardly alone in this, but they added a powerful voice.¹⁴

The 1930s ended with what is generally considered the greatest year in American movie history, with classics like *Gone With the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Ninotchka*, *Stagecoach* and many others.¹⁵

World War II influenced both Hollywood and its movies, as the studios' foreign markets and foreign income to some extent disappeared. Initially isolationist, the studios soon turned to interventionist and patriotic movies like *Sergeant York*, *Casablanca* and *Mrs. Miniver* to please the audience. Movies taking their plots directly from the war, such as *Bataan*, *Air Force* and *Destination Tokyo*, were also made, and the US Government employed many Hollywood professionals to make propaganda movies. At the same time, gangster films developed into the *film noir* genre, whose aesthetics and moods would influence directors and films of many genres, including some of Capra's films. Even though the immediate postwar years represented the peak of cinema attendance and popularity, major changes were soon to be undertaken. Olivia De Havilland's legal victory over Warner Bros. in 1945 put an end to the studios' dictatorial control over the stars, and the Supreme Court in 1948 effectively ended the vertically integrated studio system and the practice of "block booking." The House Un-American Activities Committee

accused a large number of movie professionals of being Communists, and brought unrest and paranoia to Hollywood. In addition to all this, the new medium of television would prove to be a terrifyingly worthy opponent to the silver screen in a battle television would eventually win. Furthermore, the tastes of the audiences had changed once more, and some directors, among them Capra, found that their styles were deemed old-fashioned and uninteresting. By 1950, the Golden Age of Hollywood had effectively ended, and the filmmaking world faced a period of uncertainty, restructuring and financial decline.¹⁶

The life and career of Frank Capra

It was in this historical and cultural context that Frank Capra was to create a massive legacy of classic films. He was born in Italy in 1897, but moved with his family to California at the age of six. His family was very poor, and he had to work his way through an education. When he graduated from the California Institute of Technology as a chemical engineer in 1918, he received plenty of job offers, but decided to join the Army. On leaving the Army, Capra found that he was not able to get satisfying work within his profession. After trying out a variety of different jobs with little success, Capra got his start in the movie business in 1922. He talked his way into directing a one-reel film called *Fulah Fisher's Boarding House* for a small company based in San Francisco. Capra knew next to nothing about the film medium, but to learn more about it, he acquired a job at a small film lab. The next

twelve months, he printed, dried and spliced amateur films. He then got a job processing daily takes for Hollywood comedy director Bob Eddy, later moving on to work for Eddy also as a propman and film editor. This was when he developed his ideal of the “one man, one film” idea, which would affect his filmmaking in the years to come:

Because billions were invested in producing and exhibiting this new “art,” it became the daffiest of all “Big Businesses.” Bankers and industrialists tore their hair trying to standardize; mass-produce winning models; bring order out of chaos. They have never succeeded – and never will. The motion picture is an unresolvable dichotomy of business and art, with art being the safest bet in the long run. Year in, year out, it is the creators who strive for quality, the “one man, one film” artists, who out-succeed the industrially oriented mass producers.

That simple notion of “one man, one film” (a credo for important filmmakers since D. W. Griffith), conceived independently in a tiny cutting room far from Hollywood, became for me a fixation, an article of faith. In my subsequent forty years of film directing, I never forgot it, nor compromised with it – except once. I walked away from the shows I could not control completely from conception to delivery. I approached films with the wonder of a child, but also with the ratiocination of a scientific mind. I knew of no great book or play, no classic painting or sculpture, no lasting monument to art in any form, that was ever created by a committee – with the possible exception of the Gothic cathedrals. In art it is “one man, one painting – one statue – one book – one film.”¹⁷

Later, Eddy got him a job as gagman for Hal Roach’s “Our Gang” comedies, but Capra was fired after six months, and started working for Mack Sennett, where, in 1925, he became a gag writer for comedian Harry Langdon.¹⁸ Capra co-authored and co-directed the classic Langdon comedy *Tramp Tramp Tramp*, and when Langdon left Sennett for First National, Capra followed him and directed *The Strong Man* and *Long Pants*, both successful Langdon vehicles. Nonetheless, an ungrateful Langdon fired Capra and spread the rumor that he alone was the creative mind behind these films. Not being able to find work elsewhere in Hollywood, Capra went to New York in 1927 and got a job directing *For the Love of Mike*, introducing Broadway actress Claudette Colbert to the silver screen. The movie

flopped, leaving Capra unemployed yet again. He returned to Hollywood, where he was able to get a job churning out two-reel comedies for Mack Sennett.

The turning point in his career came when he signed a contract to direct for Harry Cohn and Columbia Pictures in 1928. This event was to exert a dual influence in the film world of the thirties, as it turned Columbia into a major studio and Capra into a leading Hollywood director. Contrary to the general rule in Hollywood, Capra was given total creative freedom on his films, and was thus able to develop his own *auteur* style.¹⁹ According to film historian Ephraim Katz, his style's recurrent themes were those of "an idealistic individual, an improbable hero bucking all odds and thwarting the antisocial schemes of materialistic cynics...[and] a basic faith in the essential goodness of the common man and the inevitable triumph of honesty and justice over...selfishness and deceit."²⁰ Two factors were central in allowing this style to flourish. First, Capra's access to actors like James Stewart, Gary Cooper, Jean Arthur and Barbara Stanwyck helped him project the earnest commonness and individuality that dominated his films. Second, screenwriter Robert Riskin worked with him for more than a decade and helped to define the Capra film.

The first Capra films of particular interest were *American Madness* (1932), a comedy about how a bank failure is averted because of the intervention of small savers; *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), a miscegenation story in which an American female missionary in Shanghai falls in love with a Chinese warlord who has captured her; and *Lady for a Day* (1933), a sentimental comedy in which an old apple seller with the help of gangsters poses as a rich woman when her daughter

visits. Then, in 1934, came Capra's first all-out success. *It Happened One Night* won all five top Academy Awards (picture, director, actor, actress, screenplay) and was a huge moneymaker. It is a romantic comedy dealing with a runaway heiress who falls in love with the reporter who is chasing her across the country. It was followed the same year by the more moderately successful *Broadway Bill*, a romantic comedy about the fortunes of a business man turned horse trainer.

Another giant upswing came in 1936 with *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, which provided Capra with his second Best Director Academy Award. On a personal-professional level, the film signified a new direction for Capra. After he had made *Broadway Bill*, Capra fell ill, and a curious incident during this time was to change his life and career profoundly. A little bald man visited Capra and told him that he was a coward and that he should use his talents for God's purpose and for the best of humanity.²¹ Capra was so taken by what the man said that he immediately reevaluated his role as a filmmaker, concluding that the man had been right. This realization of his moral responsibility heavily influenced Capra's work. As Capra said in his autobiography:

When that unknown, faceless little man rescued me from the river Styx, the few calm words he uttered served as a chrism to totally commit my talents – few or many – to the service of man. ... Did this new “dedication” affect my picturemaking, or my relationship with other creative minds? Yes, it did – drastically. Beginning with *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, my films had to *say* something.²²

It was the first in a cycle of films that were to typify his *auteur* style. His films became more occupied with individuals and their relation to society. He started mixing lighthearted entertainment with socially oriented messages. Furthermore, he wanted to make every film from that point on “his own.” In his autobiography, he

tells about how he, when confronted and criticized by other cinema luminaries for his choices of hero and subject matter, stood firm and trusted his decisions.

Mr. Deeds was followed by *Lost Horizon* in 1937. It is a Utopian story of a group of people who escapes a Chinese revolution only to be kidnapped by their pilot and taken to an idyllic civilization in a Tibetan valley. Although it is somewhat atypical of Capra's auteur style, it is still interpreted by some critics as a variation on the theme of individualism. In 1938, *You Can't Take It With You* was another smash hit for Capra, giving him Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director. It is the story of the clash between an eccentric family and a rich family and dwells, among other things, on the theme of the individual pitted against big business. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* was another jewel in Capra's crown. Released in 1939, it received eleven Oscar nominations, yet was only given one Award, for Lewis Foster's original story. Treated, at first, almost as a sort of sequel to *Mr. Deeds*, the film is a continuation of Capra's concern for the individual.

After *Mr. Smith*, Capra had had enough of Harry Cohn's dictatorial leadership, and left Columbia.²³ He formed Frank Capra Productions together with his regular screenwriter, Robert Riskin. They signed a deal with Warner Bros. and made *Meet John Doe*, which was released in 1941. Before joining the Army yet again, Capra made a black comedy farce about a homicidal family called *Arsenic and Old Lace* (based on a play by the same name), which was not released until 1944 due to copyright restrictions concerning the original play's three-year run on Broadway. During World War II, he made a highly acclaimed series of patriotic documentaries, collectively called *Why We Fight*, for the War Department.

Upon leaving the Army, Capra formed Liberty films with William Wyler, Sam Briskin and George Stevens. His first film after the war, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), was the one he would later be most closely associated with, and would remain both his and James Stewart's favorite film. Considering that Capra believed it to be his best film to date and knowing how well-loved this majestic film is now, it is strange to recognize that it was not particularly well received by the audience and the critics of the day. It was nominated for five Academy Awards, but did not win any. The formula that clicked so well with Depression era audiences was regarded as somewhat simplistic by the postwar cinema public. Only after it became standard Christmas fare on TV in the 1970s did the film get the acclaim and adoration it deserves.

Capra then made the acclaimed political satire *State of the Union* (1948). However, the films that followed it were generally of little commercial or artistic interest. He lost his popularity and his role as a social commentator was severely diminished. This developed for a number of reasons. Due to a variety of financial circumstances, Capra proposed to the other owners of Liberty Films that they ought to sell the corporation. They originally disagreed, but eventually succumbed to his request. This meant that Capra would lose his independence and creative control, as he signed a contract with Paramount Pictures. He bitterly regrets this decision in his autobiography.²⁴ Another reason was the so-called Balaban's Law, which said that "[N]o future box-office hit, no matter how great or how costly, can ever again take in more than three million dollars. Therefore, the production cost of our top films must not exceed one and a half million if we are to survive."²⁵ Barney Balaban was

president of Paramount Pictures, which was the most financially solid of all the major studios. Everyone credited this to Balaban. He was viewed as a financial wizard, and a magician at analyzing box office figures, and all the other studio heads tended to emulate his economic ideas. This meant that directors had less money to create the pictures that *they* wanted to make. A third reason was the increased power of the movie stars. Since post-war motion pictures, to a larger and larger degree, depended on a box-office attraction star to make money, stars felt that they should make decisions about filmmaking previously reserved for the director. A final reason was the fact that the public's tastes had changed to some extent, and Capra's style was no longer in vogue. The result of these developments was that Capra gradually lost control over his work, and was confined to making half-hearted, compromised films. Capra retired from the movie business in 1961. He wrote an autobiography in 1971, which was a boastful, but entertaining, account of his life and career. He died in 1991, at the age of 94.

The historiography of Frank Capra and his films

Early writings on Capra include *The Making of a Great Picture*, which was a promotional book on *Lost Horizon* that was published in 1937; *Experiments on Mass Communications* by Carl I. Hovland, Arthur A. Lumsdaine and Fred D. Sheffield, which was a study of the effects on soldiers of the *Why We Fight* series, published in 1949; and *The Distinguished Library of Frank Capra* from 1949. In

1951 came the first major work dealing with Capra's films by Richard Griffith, simply called *Frank Capra*. He made a schematic description of the typical Capra movie as a "fantasy of goodwill" in which "a messianic innocent ... pits himself against the forces of entrenched greed."²⁶ This description has been challenged by later Capra analysts. 1951 also saw the publication of a Dutch work on Capra called *Frank Capra: Leven en Werken* [*Frank Capra: His Life and Work*] by Hans Saaltink. No further major writings on Capra appeared until after he had retired from the movie business and published his autobiography *The Name Above the Title* in 1971. It is a highly readable, somewhat illuminating and very entertaining work, but has later been criticized for being boastful and incorrect. Nonetheless, it is the only extensive "Capra on Capra" source, and is indispensable as such. A near-deluge of work on the filmmaker followed his autobiography. Bruce Henstell's *Frank Capra: "One Man - One Film"* from 1971 was a transcript of an American Film Institute seminar on Capra's *auteuristic* filmmaker ideas. Donald Willis's *The Films of Frank Capra* from 1974 was the first major general work since Griffith's 1951 book. Among other things, Willis explains how and why Capra's films can be interpreted to support almost any political agenda and concludes that he finds his films basically apolitical. The following year's *Frank Capra: The Man and His Films* edited by Glatzer and Raeburn was a collection of essays and reviews on the director, and contains several interviews with Capra. It provided insight into the Capra legacy and influenced writing on the filmmaker for years to come. 1975 also saw the publication of *The Men Who Made the Movies: Interviews With Frank Capra, George Cukor, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock,*

Vincente Minnelli, King Vidor, Raoul Walsh, and William A. Wellman edited by Richard Schickel, a volume that provided insight as to how these directors' movies were made. Leland Poague's *The Cinema of Frank Capra* was also published in 1975, and was Poague's doctoral dissertation. It is a general discussion of Capra's work, and was the largest work on Capra to date. In 1977, came Charles Maland's *American Visions: The Films of Chaplin, Ford, Capra and Welles, 1936-1941*, which was a study of the social messages in some of these directors' films, and Victor Scherle and William Turner Levy's *The Films of Frank Capra*, a collection of reviews and commentaries on Capra and his films. Allen Estrin's *Hollywood Professionals, vol. 6: Capra, Cukor, Brown* from 1980 was another general discussion of Capra and his films. Maland's extensive and insightful *Frank Capra* from 1980 is described as being the "best general discussion of Capra's films to date" by Raymond Carney in his *American Vision - The Films of Frank Capra* from 1986.²⁷ Carney's book, the first large-scale interpretation of Capra's films to appear after Maland's book, was the first interdisciplinary work on the filmmaker. He draws a line between two distinctly different traditions of American artistic and popular consciousness and expression. On the one hand, there is the "visionary, idealistic, romantic" strain, represented by for example Edwards, Henry James, Hawthorne, Emerson, Whitman, William James, Faulkner, Mailer and Capra. On the other hand, there is the strain that advocates "a commitment to the authority of practical and realistic forms and forces that exclude or resist the individual imagination," in which Carney places Franklin, Byrd, Wharton, Dreiser, Dos Passos, Hawks, Cukor, Lubitsch, Stevens, Wellman and Wyler. Carney claims that

even though Capra's films argue in favor of traditional American values, there is an uncertainty about how and whether the individual can express him- or herself within a society of linguistic and social limitations and norms. Carney discusses views held by earlier scholarly works on Capra, and leaves virtually no element of his movies unexamined. The book represents a watershed in the history of scholarly work on Capra, and is referred to in all subsequent major literary undertakings on Capra. 1986 also saw the publication of the first book to deal with only one of Capra's films, Jeanine Basinger's *The It's a Wonderful Life Book*. It is an extremely close look at this American film icon, and provides new views on ideas and ideals in the movie. Charles Wolfe's *A Reference Guide to the Films of Frank Capra* was published in 1987, and is deemed by Leland Poague as an indispensable companion to the study of Capra and his films.²⁸ The first major French study of Capra's films was made in 1988 by Michel Cieutat in his *Frank Capra*. Wolfe's 1989 effort, *Meet John Doe*, was an entire volume dedicated to analytical and critical writings on Capra's 1941 film. Lee Lourdeaux's *Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America: Ford, Capra, Coppola and Scorsese*, from 1990, was a work that emphasized the ethnic backgrounds of major American directors, some of which are said to be among the "most American" of them all. Barbara Bowman's *Master Space: Film Images of Capra, Lubitsch, Sternberg, and Wyler* from 1992 gave thorough examinations of how these directors used visual space in their movies. Joseph McBride's 1992 book *Frank Capra The Catastrophe of Success* was a revisionist account of Capra and his films that portrays Capra as a man whose films represented nothing of his personality. He claims that Robert Riskin, not Capra

himself, was the person most responsible for “the Capra touch.” He harshly attacks Capra’s autobiography from 1971 and dismantles many of the arguments and assertions presented by Capra. Leland Poague’s *Another Frank Capra*, published in 1994, was mainly a book written to display Capra as a modernist, proto-feminist director, which was an aspect of his movies that had hardly been mentioned at all by previous Capra writers. However, *Another Frank Capra* also included an entire chapter (out of seven) on what Poague found to be the problems of McBride’s book from 1992. He dissects arguments and statements by McBride, and provides alternative readings and understandings. Wes Gehring’s *Populism and the Capra Legacy* from 1995 was devoted to analyzing and discussing Capra as a Populist and his influence as such on later filmmakers. This notion of Capra had previously been briefly discussed by other writers, but this is the only volume dedicated to this aspect alone. Robert Sklar, in his *Movie-Made America* (second edition from 1994), denounces the understanding of Capra as a Populist as wrong.²⁹ Sklar also edited a book called *Frank Capra: Authorship and the Studio System* in 1998, about Capra’s struggle for independence and auteurship at Columbia Pictures. Two volumes published in the late nineties, Sam B. Girgus’s *Hollywood Renaissance: The Cinema of Democracy in the Era of Ford, Capra, and Kazan* and Colin Shindler’s *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society 1929-1939*, give descriptions and analyses of how Hollywood expressed American ideals and values during the Great Depression, and deal a lot with Frank Capra and his films. In 2002, Joe Saltzman’s book *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* provided yet another new approach to Capra’s films. Poague published a collection

of Capra interviews in 2004, *Frank Capra Interviews*, and later that year, Eric Smoodin published a book, *Regarding Frank Capra*, that focused on audiences' reactions to his films and how these reactions influenced Capra's filmmaking.

I have chosen to work with four of Capra's films: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Meet John Doe* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. I have chosen these four films for two reasons. First, because they are among Capra's greatest popular and critical successes, and considered typical of his *auteur* style. Second, because their plots and themes are, to a large extent, concerned with individualism and the individual's relation to society and with the relationship between biblical and republican individualism and utilitarian and expressive individualism.

Chapter 2

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town takes place in Mandrake Falls, Vermont, and New York City in 1936. It opens with a car crash, and one of the victims of the crash was one of America's richest men, Mr. Semple. The search for his heir begins, and his nephew Longfellow Deeds is eventually contacted by Semple's power of attorney, John Cedar. Deeds is a rural man, apparently simple and naive, who owns a tallow works, plays the tuba and is the local poet. He has to go to New York in order to assume the responsibilities of his uncle's large business corporation, and the whole town is at the train station to see him off. Cedar wants to get power of attorney for Deeds because his law firm (Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & Budington) has embezzled a lot of money from Semple. Back in New York, Cedar tells his colleagues that they have nothing to worry about, as Deeds apparently is a nitwit. Deeds moves into his uncle's large mansion, and is uncomfortably taken care of by servants. Cedar's attempt to get power of attorney fails, however, and a lot of other people also try to fool him unsuccessfully, so Deeds is probably more intelligent than at first assumed. Meanwhile, newspaper editor MacWade wants reporter Babe Bennett to write a story on Deeds. She waits outside of his house one night when he goes out and fakes fainting in front of him. The good-hearted Deeds takes care of her, and takes her out to a restaurant. She lies about herself, while at the same time gathering as much information about him as possible. When they meet some renowned poets in the same restaurant, the poets make fun of Deeds, and the poets and Deeds eventually get in a fight, but one of the poets regrets his misdeed, and takes them

out for a wild night on the town. The next day, Bennett starts writing ridiculing articles about him, calling him “Cinderella Man.” Deeds, of course, knows her only as Mary Dawson, so they continue their relationship. They go out sightseeing and experience a number of things together, like visiting Grant’s tomb, and the articles keep coming. Eventually, however, Bennett starts developing qualms about her treatment of Deeds, as she has begun to fall for his naive charm, honesty and wholesomeness. One night, after they have taken a walk, Deeds gives her a poem in which he asks her to marry him and move back to Mandrake Falls with him. She is supposed to answer him the very next day at his house, but his assistant, Cobb, tells him that Mary Dawson is Babe Bennett before she gets there. When he finds out, he won’t talk to her, so she has no way of explaining the transformation she has gone through. He decides to go home to Mandrake Falls, but suddenly a man breaks into his house and threatens him with a gun. The man breaks into tears before he shoots, and tells his tragic story of poverty and losing his farm. Deeds sympathizes with the man, and decides to give away nearly all of his \$20 million fortune to poor farmers. This is a major news event, of course, and Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & Budington realize that they must act quickly if they are not to be exposed as the swindlers they are. Together with another nephew of Semple they arrange it so that Deeds is falsely charged with insanity, and has to go through a sanity hearing. He appears to be completely devastated by this blow, and does not want to hire any lawyers or defend himself in any way, and Bennett’s attempts to get in touch with him are in vain. As the sanity hearing progresses, lies, half-truths and more or less trustworthy witnesses are used to prove Deeds’ insanity. When Bennett is asked to take the

stand, she tries to explain the truth about Deeds, but she is hushed up. When the judges are about to arrive at their decision to put Deeds in an institution, Bennett exclaims her admiration and love for Deeds, and the rest of the people in the courtroom also stand up and ask him to defend himself. Moved by these outbursts, Deeds takes the stand and systematically and rationally discusses and dismantles the pieces of testimony that have been used against him. He explains his views on society and why he wants to help the poor farmers. The hearing ends with the judge saying: "In my opinion, you are not only sane, but you are the sanest man who ever walked into this courtroom!"³⁰ Deeds is carried triumphantly from the courtroom by the cheering farmers before he takes Bennett in his arms and they kiss.

The film is, without a doubt, concerned with American individualism. Capra said this about *Deeds*:

And what was the great "message" of *Mr. Deeds*? Nothing earth-shaking. Just this: A simple honest man, driven into a corner by predatory sophisticates, can, if he will, reach deep down into his God-given resources and come up with the necessary handfuls of courage, wit, and love to triumph over his environment. That theme prevailed in all - except two - of my future films. It was the rebellious cry of the individual against being trampled to an ort [sic] by massiveness - mass production, mass thought, mass education, mass politics, mass wealth, mass conformity.³¹

This quotation shows that Capra wanted to display his approval and affirmation of the ideals of individual value, self-reliance, autonomy and self-development in this film, and Longfellow Deeds is right from the start portrayed as an individualistic character. He is a self-reliant business man, as the co-owner of a tallow works, and explores his personal cultural interests through playing the tuba and writing poetry. This individualism is expressed within the town of Mandrake Falls, a community which Deeds appreciates very much, and vice versa. When Cedar and his associates come to Deeds' house for the first time, he is in the park, arranging a bazaar to raise

money for a fire engine for the town, which shows that he is involved in and cares about the development and well-being of his community. And when Deeds leaves for New York, the whole town is there to see him off, which shows that they care about him as an individual.

Other early scenes continue to illustrate the film's emphasis on individuality. When an uncomfortable Deeds is being outfitted in new clothes by tailors, he complains that his time and opinions have been requested by various visitors ever since he came to New York. "There's been a lot of them around here already. Strangest kind of people. Salesmen, politicians, moochers. All want something. Haven't had a minute to myself," Deeds says.³² At the same time, Mr. Cedar tries to persuade him to give him power of attorney. But the autonomous Deeds resists the pressure and denies Cedar the position, at least until he has further acquainted himself with the financial matters. Suddenly, a Mr. Hallor enters and claims to represent "Mrs. Semple" and her child with Mr. Semple, but his phony claim is later intelligently exposed by Deeds. All these incidents merely serve to invade Deeds's privacy and threaten to undermine his own individual personality. He is confronted with the dangers of being molded and transformed (literally tailored) into someone else and of being controlled. Nonetheless, Mr. Deeds maintains his own personality and remains true to his values. In another scene in the same room, as McBride points out, his idea of egalitarian individual value shines through when he refuses to let his valet help him put on his pants.³³

The members of the opera board also try to control and manipulate Deeds, as they ask him to pay for their large deficit. But he is able to act on his own and think

for himself, and refuses to pay the \$180.000. Another symbol of Capra not letting Deeds be “compartmentalized” by the agents of conformity is the large hall of the mansion which, with all its impersonal, colorless, stone-cold enormity, is the antithesis to Deeds’s colorful and playful personality. Rather than being influenced by this physical environment, Deeds is a character who uses this environment to express his own individuality. By letting him slide down the banister, play around with a nude statue and later play with the echo of his voice, Capra shows us that Deeds has not lost his stamp of individual originality. When Deeds wants to go out at night, he is stopped by two men who inform him that they are his bodyguards. Immediately suspicious and resentful of this arrangement, Deeds fools them into a closet and locks them up. Locking up his unwanted bodyguards is Deeds’s way of refusing to let anybody infringe on his privacy and autonomy. Furthermore, his individuality and originality are contrasted with the group conformity, inhumanity and insensitivity of the law officers of Cedar, Cedar, Cedar and Budington. Their rigid and confined physical movements are analogous to their rigid and confined mental movements, which are also antithetical to the mentality of the protagonist. They think alike, they walk alike, they dress alike and they act alike. Unlike Longfellow Deeds, they are not able (or willing) to express themselves and operate independently and individualistically.

After Deeds has met Babe Bennett (under the false alias Mary Dawson), they go to a restaurant frequented by several members of the literary world. Deeds and Bennett are invited to sit down with them, but the writers subtly make fun of Deeds. Rather than compromising his identity and walking away disgraced (or pretending

not to notice the ridiculing) when discovering this, he stands up for himself and makes a plea for humanism and interpersonal respect:

It's easy to make fun of somebody if you don't care how much you hurt them. ... I know I must look funny to you, but maybe if you went to Mandrake Falls you'd look just as funny to us, only nobody would laugh at you and make you feel ridiculous, because that wouldn't be good manners.³⁴

This little speech is an indication of his belief in the inborn, universal value of every human being. It is also relevant to observe that the authors ridicule Deeds, as a group, whereas he stands up for himself as an individual. Another example from the film showing Deeds' (and Capra's) admiration of American individualism and individual initiative is found in the scene where he and Bennett visit Grant's tomb. She asks him if he is disappointed, but he says that it depends on what you see. He sees

a small Ohio farm boy becoming a great soldier. I see General Lee with a broken heart surrendering. And I can see the beginning of a new nation, as Abraham Lincoln said. And I can see that Ohio farm boy being inaugurated as President. Things like that can only happen in a country like America.³⁵

The values that Longfellow Deeds presupposes in this statement are typical of the American ideas of self-development and self-reliance and the thought that you should always pursue your goals and ambitions and become all that you can.

Deeds, then, is clearly portrayed as a self-reliant, autonomous and individualistic character. This individualism takes on another dimension when he is confronted by the starving farmer. Whereas the protagonists of Capra's earlier thirties pictures were ultimately removed from "real" society, from *Deeds* onwards, the individual had to express itself within a complex, extended society. His earlier protagonists were often rich and never experienced nor dealt with genuine problems like poverty, and they were often only concerned with themselves and a few people

close to them. But when *Mr. Deeds* was released, no man was an island any more. According to Raymond Carney, even though *It Happened One Night* was a transitional film in many ways, “with the films that follow - *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *You Can’t Take It with You*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Meet John Doe*, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, and *State of the Union* - Capra embeds the individual in a social matrix...”³⁶ This becomes evident when Deeds decides he wants to share his newly found fortune with those less fortunate by building and giving away two thousand separate ten-acre farms. However, this is not his initial reaction, as he suspects the farmer of being a moocher and a liar and wants to throw him out. But the farmer gives a speech that makes him think otherwise. It is important to note that the farmer stresses that his decision to approach Deeds has not been an easy one, but an act of desperation. He has been a hard-working, self-reliant farmer for twenty years, and he is only looking for a job. “A chance to feed a wife and kids. I’m a farmer. A job. That’s what I want. ... Standing there in the breadlines. It killed me to take a handout. I ain’t used to it,” he says.³⁷ The honesty and sincerity of his appeal and the fact that he is not a moocher, but really a self-reliant farmer who suffers these problems because of the Depression, is what convinces Deeds to give away his fortune.

It is appropriate to wonder why Deeds wishes to redistribute his money in this way. This is also the core question of the sanity hearing. When the judge asks Deeds why he has this idea of giving away the twenty million dollars, he uses a kind of parable to explain his reasoning:

From what I can see, no matter what system of government we have, there’ll always be leaders and always be followers. It’s like the road out in front of my house. It’s on a steep hill. Every day, I watch the cars climbing up. Some go lickety-split up that hill on high, some have to shift into second. And some sputter and shake and slip back to the bottom again.

Same cars, same gasoline, yet some make it and some don't. And I say the fellows who can make the hill on high should stop once in a while to help those who can't. That's all I'm trying to do with this money - help the fellows who can't make the hill on high.³⁸

This answer could easily be interpreted as a political statement and/or representing a political ideology. Indeed, as scholars and critics like Willis, Estrin and Maland point out, Capra and his movies have been said to be advocates of Communism, fascism, Marxism, populism, conservatism, McCarthyism, New-Dealism, anti-Hooverism, jingoism, socialism and capitalism, depending on the critic. They conclude, however, by saying that his films are not concerned with any political ideology or system *per se*. Rather, they are interested in moral and philosophical issues.³⁹ This is also the case in this film. Deeds's answer is not meant to support a political agenda, but it is a reflection of how he thinks about himself, his fellow citizens and society at large. Maland says that his plan

to give away 2,000 separate ten-acre farms to individual farmers is almost Jeffersonian: it would have created 2,000 yeoman farmers, each with a stake in society. Since Deeds's plan proposed voluntary (not governmentally imposed) redistribution of wealth, one can only conclude that it encouraged traditional American values of individualism, self-help (the farmers would be given the land if they worked it for three years), and voluntary philanthropy.⁴⁰

The individualism he speaks of here is biblical/republican at its core. The "success" that Deeds wants to result from his plan would ultimately not be material wealth for the individual farmers, but a healthy community of self-reliant, hard-working, moral inhabitants. Furthermore, the plan gives the farmers a better chance to involve themselves and participate in the development of society. Maland refers to the idea as being Jeffersonian, which links it even stronger to the tradition of republican individualism. Maland says that "Capra's films in the late 1930s and early 1940s are strongly shaped by both Christian and American values,"⁴¹ and this

is evident in Deeds's concern for his equals. Leland Poague also emphasizes the socially oriented aspect of Deeds's thinking by saying that "Deeds rightly replies that it is not a matter of political ideology but simple human responsibility."⁴² Longfellow Deeds is an individualistic character who understands that he only truly fulfills himself and his potential as an individual when his resources are used to serve the common good. He is a representative of the biblical and republican strains of American individualism.

To elaborate on Capra's depiction of the ideals of self-development and autonomy and the struggle between biblical/republican and utilitarian/expressive individualism, the two major transitions in the film, those of Babe Bennett and Longfellow Deeds, must be discussed. When we first encounter Bennett, she is an egotistic, cynical, opportunistic journalist whose main purpose in life appears to be the accumulation of money and other goods for her own benefit. She uses other people as means, and does not seem to care about her community and the common good. She has no wider framework to give her a larger sense of the purpose of life, and moral questions have become matters of practicality and technicality to her. In other words, she embodies a lot of the unhealthy aspects of individualism. She has neglected the importance of the social context of biblical and republican individualism, and her view of life echoes Emerson's take on self-reliance. Thus, she can be said to represent some of the ideas of utilitarian and expressive individualism. However, because of Deeds's positive influence on her, Bennett eventually sheds her unhealthy, cynical world view and comes up with a truer, more authentic version of herself. Poague claims that this transformation is

apparent as early as the restaurant scene.⁴³ The change in her persona becomes more and more obvious as the story progresses, and in a key scene, when she is unable to write another story, she confides to her roommate:

Mabel, that guy is either the dumbest, stupidest, most imbecilic idiot in the world or else he's the grandest thing alive. ... I'm crucifying him. ... Here's a guy that's wholesome and fresh. To us he looks like a freak. ... He's got goodness, Mabel. Do you know what that is? No, of course you don't. We've forgotten. We're too busy being smart alecks. Too busy in a crazy competition for nothing.⁴⁴

Her alteration becomes complete after Deeds has asked her to marry him. But when he discovers the truth about her, she does not get a chance to tell him about it. However, she refuses to give up on him, and does everything she can to save him from his potential downfall, finally succeeding when she expresses her love and admiration for him in the courtroom scene. Carney says about her that “[I]n the course of the film Bennett moves from emotional detachment and self-interestedness to passionate involvement with Deeds and the cause he represents,”⁴⁵ and Estrin says that “Babe, Cobb and the farmers ... are determined to demonstrate their faith in Deeds and the ideals he, and now they, stand for.”⁴⁶ The cause and the ideals that Deeds represents are, as I have established, the principles and ideas of biblical and republican individualism. Bennett has gone from being a part of the utilitarian and expressive individualistic tradition to the biblical and republican tradition of individualism.

Although it is clear right from the start of Deeds's New York stay that he is not as innocent and naive as he appears when he is first encountered in Mandrake Falls, it is just as clear that he has gone through a process of transformation when he decides to speak in his sanity hearing. First, the decision signifies a more deliberate commitment to the principles of biblical and republican individualism

and his social responsibility. Bennett, her editor, Deeds's press agent Cobb and the farmers appeal to him in that order, and all these appeals contribute to his decision, but it is significant that his decision is not made until after the hundreds of farmers have begged him to defend himself in order to save them. It is not only his obligation to himself, but also his obligation to other people, that persuade him to speak up.

On a different note, he seems to have reached a new, more advanced level of autonomous awareness. Carney argues that "[H]is incontrovertible accomplishment is to shed every vestige of whatever innocence he might originally have had... Deeds becomes a kind of literary-textual critic par excellence..."⁴⁷ He is able to fully understand the "text," meaning the social reality to which he is confined. He is also able to use this understanding to his own advantage, and the advantage of the common good. By systematically discussing and dismantling the pieces of testimony that have been used against him, he changes the dispositions of the judges to his favor. For example, he compares his tuba-playing to the judge's "o-filling" and Dr. van Hallor's "doodling" (in order to prove that everyone does something to help them think), and he reveals that the Faulkner sisters, who called him "pixilated" (i.e. crazy, confused), believe that everyone in the world is pixilated. Carney goes further in this analogy of Deeds as a literary critic and calls him a deconstructionist, which means an analyst who emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression. By deconstructing his reality,

Deeds is able to avoid being dominated by the text, the rules of the social context, which would have severely infringed on his autonomy.

The idea of Deeds as a deconstructionist is further related to the idea of the artificiality of society, and the idea of autonomy. Carney argues that

[D]econstruction ... is thoroughly consistent with, and eminently convertible into an all-American assertion of freedom... Deeds's activity of deconstruction is a prototypically American way of levering himself outside of all texts, of asserting the artificiality of all systems, institutions, and codes of understanding. ... To be able to play this way in a courtroom, one has to recognize that a social institution like a court, and the discourse that is admissible or speakable within it, is ... artificial and arbitrary... If Capra's heroes no longer attempt to flee from the repressive forms of society into a world of romance or imagination, it is because for the first time they recognize that the society they flee from is itself an artificial, arbitrary creation of the human imagination...⁴⁸

This means that you cannot run away from society and its codes, but you can understand them, and thus play with them and use them as you see fit, which is exactly what Deeds does. Rather than choosing what Carney considers European responses to this recognition of society's artificiality, such as the initial anomie and nihilism of Babe Bennett, the cynical opportunism of Cedar and his kind and the alienated powerlessness of the farmers, Carney claims that Deeds offers a uniquely American option of optimism and creativity.⁴⁹ However, I would like to question this argument. I do not necessarily think that all the attitudes Carney describes here are responses to the artificiality of society, I would call Bennett's and Cedar's attitudes representations of the unhealthy aspects of American individualistic self-reliance and autonomy, since their attitudes are damaging both to themselves and to others. I do not think that what Carney calls "the alienated powerlessness" of the farmers is a response to the artificiality of society at all. Instead, I think that their dispositions are simply authentic expressions of the disappointment and hopelessness they feel regarding the Depression and losing their farms.

Nevertheless, I agree with Carney that Deeds's attitude is one of American optimism and creativity, that is to say the healthy aspects of American individualism. I agree with him because I believe that Deeds's response involves a usage of this artificiality of society to improve the conditions of other people. It is, nonetheless, important to remember that this option is not one which Deeds automatically chooses. He goes through a phase in which he flirts with a different kind of dealing with this awareness of society's artificiality, which is that of a retreat into stillness, silence and passivity. This last-resort plan of self-preservation is almost impossible to distinguish from self-annihilation, and fortunately, Deeds finally rejects this option. This aspect of the movie is an example of how Capra believes in the idea of the abstract individual and the artificiality of society, but will not let the individual retreat and retire from his obligations to himself and to his fellow men.

Carney also seems to tie this artificialness of society to the ideas of ethical and epistemological individualism as he argues that "Deeds ... learns to become a performer in an entirely more modern, marginal and challenging sense..." because "[T]here is no possibility of simply reimposing order from on high as a kind of father, ruler, or god. That sort of authority is not available in the world he inhabits..."⁵⁰ The ideas of ethical and epistemological relativism are part of the utilitarian and expressive individualistic traditions. I would like to disagree with Carney on this, as I see Capra's (and Deeds's) view as representing the traditions of biblical and republican individualism, and of German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who rejected the notion of ethical relativism. Kant's Categorical Imperative applies

to Capra's portrayal of the actions of Longfellow Deeds,⁵¹ as he depicts Deeds's actions as desirable, whereas the actions of Cedar and his kind are portrayed as reprehensible. Thus, Capra still believes in an objective difference between right and wrong. The autonomy that the Capra characters are endowed with is not a freedom to do whatever one wants to do. It is a "moral" freedom to do what is right and good in relation to oneself and one's fellow men.

Like Babe Bennett, Cedar, Cedar, Cedar and Budington are representatives of utilitarian and expressive individualism. They are examples of what can happen if one faces the ultimate conclusions and consequences of some of the principles of these individualistic traditions. They are selfish, cynical and opportunistic, and do not hesitate to use Longfellow Deeds as a means to their own personal ends. Unlike Bennett, however, they do not go through some sort of transformation. They stay this way throughout the film. Even though they are portrayed as far less threatening than the villains of the Capra films that followed, their function in this film is to represent one of the sides in the struggle between the traditions and systems of values, ideas and principles I have called biblical/republican and utilitarian and expressive individualism. They and their ideas eventually lose the battle, and the fact that Deeds wins is Capra's way of showing his point of view as a supporter of the biblical and republican strains of American individualism.

Chapter 3

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington takes place in a town in an unnamed state and Washington, D.C. in 1939. It starts with a chain of telephone calls bringing the message of the death of a U.S. senator. Governor Hopper, thus, has to appoint a new senator, but it is obvious that his opinion is not an independent one. He is the puppet of senior senator Paine and corrupt media mogul and political boss Jim Taylor. They are the ones deciding who will become the new senator, and they are looking for a man who can take orders from them, since they are going to push through corrupt legislation that involves plans to build a dam on land they own. However, their first choice is so overwhelmingly denounced by the public that the governor must find a new candidate. Later, at the dinner table, his children tell him that their boy scout leader, Jefferson Smith, should become the new senator. After initially rejecting this proposal, the governor takes their advice and informs Paine and Taylor of his decision. They oppose it, but he convinces them, and appoints Smith senator at a grand banquet. Smith is a naive, patriotic, honest, likeable young man, who gives a humble speech, mentioning that his father knew Senator Paine very well many years ago, and that he admired him a lot. Paine and Smith take the train to Washington together and talk about how Paine and Smith's father were "the champions of lost causes," and how lost causes were the only causes worth fighting for. Smith's father was killed while working as an editor. When they get to Washington, Smith runs off and goes sightseeing on his own, because he has always dreamed of seeing the capital and its monuments. His final stop is Lincoln

Memorial, where he sees a little boy reading the Gettysburg Address to his grandfather. When he gets to his office, he meets Saunders, his secretary, who has grown cynical and tired of the political back-stabbing and intrigues of the capital, and press secretary Moore. Smith later meets with a number of Washington journalists, who portray him as a moron. Smith gets furious and confronts the reporters, who then tell him that he is only an “honorary stooge” in the Senate. He is dispirited and wants to quit, but Paine soothes him by saying he can still do something good by sponsoring a bill for a national boys camp. Smith enthusiastically and tirelessly starts drafting the bill with Saunders by his side. She is initially pessimistic and sarcastic, but after he gives an inspiring and idealistic speech about the meaning of liberty, she eventually falls in love with his ideals and Smith himself. They work all night, and the next morning Smith introduces his bill to the Senate. It so happens that he wants to establish the boys camp on Willet Creek, the very land that Paine and Taylor have planned to use in their scheming. Naturally, Paine and Taylor must find a way to stop this bill, and Paine’s daughter Susan, on whom Smith has a crush, is selected to take Smith out, in order to keep him out of the Senate the next day, so that their deficiency bill can be passed. Saunders gets so jealous that she takes Moore out to get drunk. When they get back to the office, Saunders tells Smith about the Willet Creek conspiracy. Smith confronts Paine, and Taylor comes to Washington to talk to him. The boss informs him of how “the machine” works, and Smith runs to Paine, who confirms the story. Smith decides to expose this scheme in the Senate, but Paine is too fast for him, and announces that Smith is the crook, that it is he who owns the land upon which the

boys camp was to be built. He is impeached, and forged deeds and lying witnesses are brought in by Taylor's machine to substantiate Paine's untruthful accusation. Smith is devastated by this blow, and he visits the Lincoln Memorial, where he earlier found inspiration and strength, once again. Saunders comes looking for him, but he tells her that she was right, that his ideals are a lot of junk. But the transformed Saunders encourages him to fight on, and outlines how he can filibuster in the Senate until the truth about Paine and Taylor is exposed. The next day, he holds the floor for an unbelievable 24 hours, even though he is verbally assaulted by the other senators, especially by Paine. Meanwhile, in his home state, all attempts to clear his name are thwarted by Taylor's machinery and his smearing campaigns, and public opinion soon turns against Smith. At the end of his filibuster, he is suddenly confronted with stacks of letters and telegrams, produced by Taylor's people, demanding he quit his position. He grabs the letters and appeals one last time to his one-time friend Paine, drawing on their earlier conversations about lost causes and Smith's father. Smith then collapses. Paine rushes out of the Senate, and unsuccessfully tries to commit suicide, before he rushes back in and tells everyone the truth. The film ends with scenes of celebration.

The world Capra presents us in *Mr. Smith* is more threatening to and oppressive of the individualistic protagonist than the one we are presented with in *Mr. Deeds*. The impersonality of technologies, systems and institutions seems to have utterly peripheralized individuals. Whereas the protagonist faced the danger of being "tailored" into someone else in *Deeds*, he faces the danger of being "Tailored" into someone else in *Smith*. Boss Jim Taylor seeks only an easily

controllable puppet as a new senator for the benefit of his political “machine,” which controls individuals to the extent that they are mere pieces of a puzzle. Both Senator Paine and Governor Hopper have erased their personal identities and attained corporate, machine-controlled identities. The relationships between these politicians and Taylor are not filled with any emotion or personal allegiance. To quote Carney, “[T]here are no permanent enemies and no dependable friends in this impersonal world; there is only a network of shifting power relations...”⁵² Individuals may come and go, but the machine is a constant. In the very beginning of the film, Capra employs the image of the telephone system to symbolize this impersonality. It is a model of human interaction in which voices are disembodied and stripped of personal and biological associations. Once individuals have become part of a system like this, they are no longer unique and irreplaceable. They have become components of a larger, impersonal system, and can easily be replaced. In the beginning of the film, we observe two phone calls between three of the important characters, Governor Hopper, Senator Paine and Jim Taylor. This is done so fast, however, that we are barely able to recognize any of them as a person. This is Capra’s deliberate way of showing us not “the presence of *people*, but the power and inclusiveness of an elaborately coded and hierarchical *system of relationships*,” as Carney says.⁵³

The way the main character of the story is introduced is also indicative of how decentralized and underappreciated the individual is in this world. After a web of relations, pressures and influences has been spun, we know what piece of the puzzle is missing, and when we encounter Jefferson Smith, he is treated only as the

“someone” who is to fill this position. Fueling this portrayal of the insignificance of the individual is the fact that not only is Smith unable to affect these systems already in place around him, but he is not even aware of them at this point. Unknowingly, on the train to Washington, Smith makes a comment (that he will later contradict by his actions) about the situation Taylor and Paine hope to have put him in when he says that “I suppose, Mr. Paine, when a fellow bucks up against a big organization like that, one man by himself can’t get very far, can he?”⁵⁴ Another element in the film showing how the strength of the individual has been set aside, is the fact that almost all the important discourse has to be mediated through systems and organizations. Longfellow Deeds was able to address his accusers directly, and as an individual person. What Smith says in the Senate must be processed through newspapers and radio stations before it reaches its outside audience, and he must act as Senator Smith, not simply as citizen Smith.

All this constitutes a world that Jefferson Smith refuses to be a part of. He is an individualistic character, who will not compromise his ideals or identity. In his home state, he is the leader of the Boy Rangers and editor of their newsletter, *Boy Stuff*, and Governor Hopper’s children say that he even put out a forest fire by himself. This shows that he is involved in the care-taking of his community. He is, in turn, well-liked by his community as an individual, especially by the thousands of Boy Rangers and their parents. After Smith has arrived in Washington, he goes on a sightseeing tour where he sees the Supreme Court, the White House, the Washington Monument, statues of Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams and Alexander Hamilton and Arlington National Cemetery. The tour culminates in his

visit to Lincoln Memorial. The adoration he shows for these legendary figures of American history and their principles firmly places him within the republican strain of individualism. The film particularly lingers on Thomas Jefferson, the founding father of American democracy and republican individualism. Smith's first name, Jefferson, is also an obvious symbol of his positioning within the republican strain, and as Estrin and Maland say, his last name is a symbol of how he embodies the American everyman.⁵⁵ Smith running away from his party could even be said to be an indication of him asserting his autonomy. Later, after he has discovered that the Washington reporters have ridiculed him, he tracks them down and (literally) fights for his dignity.

Jefferson Smith is Capra's mouthpiece in the movie, and stresses the importance of individual value, self-reliance and autonomy. When discussing the shaping of his bill in his office with Saunders, he gives an emotional speech about the importance of freedom and autonomy. "Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books, Miss Saunders. Men should hold it up in front of them every single day of their lives and say, 'I'm free, to think and to speak. My ancestors couldn't. I can. And my children will,'" he says.⁵⁶ This is a liberty that Smith is not willing to sacrifice or compromise. After he has found out how the Taylor machine works, he is given a chance to become a part of it. Taylor is willing to give him a lucrative job or anything else he wants if he only agrees to become a part of the machine. Smith refuses to join Paine and Taylor, and maintains his individuality and idealism. The 24-hour filibuster is Capra's way of showing how much individual effort can matter, and how important it is to rely on and trust yourself and your ideals. Smith,

as an individual, not as part of a machine or an organization, fights the evil forces he is up against. Estrin argues that “[T]he machine has tried to smash him into a political nonentity, to steal his individuality and destroy his faith in his country and himself, but he foils their best efforts and in doing so emerges from the struggle toughened for the inevitable battles that lie ahead.”⁵⁷ Capra, through Smith, wants us to rediscover the personal feelings and beliefs for which there are no room in Taylor’s world. By sympathizing with Smith, we must reinstall the individual at the center of the social reality.

Like Deeds, Smith must express his individuality within a social reality. This becomes evident on two levels. First, on a specific level, he wishes to establish a national boys camp to ensure sound development of the future generations of Americans. “You see, if we could just get the poor kids off the streets, out of the cities, for a few months in the summer, and let them learn something about nature, American ideals,” Smith says as he explains why he wants to establish this camp.⁵⁸ This specific concern about the welfare and development of young boys becomes more general, more universal after he has discovered the corruption of the political status quo. He starts fighting for the very ideals and principles that America was founded on. This is evident in the speeches and statements Smith makes in the Senate in his filibuster. He reads out loud the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which once again proves Smith to be a supporter of republican individualism. Faced with the bureaucracy, technicality and impersonality of political life, he says

I wouldn’t give you two cents for all your fancy rules if, behind them, they didn’t have a little bit of plain, ordinary kindness - and a little looking out for the other fella, too. That’s pretty important all that. It’s just the blood and bone and sinew of this democracy that some great men handed down to the human race, that’s all!⁵⁹

In his last appeal to Paine he says

I guess this is just another lost cause, Mr. Paine. All you people don't know about the lost causes. Mr. Paine does. He said once they were the only causes worth fighting for. And he fought for them once, for the only reason that any man ever fights for them. Because of just one plain simple rule: 'Love thy neighbor.' And in this world today, full of hatred, a man who knows that one rule has a great trust.⁶⁰

Smith and Capra insist that the social responsibility of the individual must not be forgotten and neglected. One does not live in this world alone; each and every one of us must take care of the people around us. If this responsibility is ignored, the very backbone of American society is in danger, Smith believes. Both the allusion to *The Gospel According to Matthew* chapter 22, verses 34-40,⁶¹ which is quite obvious in Smith's statements, and the fact that Smith reads out loud from *I Corinthians* 13, 13 ("the greatest of these is charity"), reveal Capra's support of Christian social ethics. Smith is a character who believes that "success" is a community of ethical, spiritual people who look after and take care of each other. His version of individualism is firmly placed in a social and ethical context, and he is thus a representative of biblical, as well as republican, individualism.

A film like this cannot avoid touching upon the subject of political individualism, an idea which claims that political authority is not derived from divine or natural law. It is most often used about ideologies that aim to confine the functions and the authority of the state within fixed limits. In the USA, democratic elections have always been the way to distribute political offices, and limitation of the government's authority has been a perennial ideological and political issue, so it is safe to say that the idea has a long and solid historical background in America. There is a scene where Smith visits the Lincoln Memorial and is clearly inspired by a little boy reading out loud the famous line "and that government of the people, by

the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” from Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. This was something that actually happened to Frank Capra when he was in Washington, and he wanted to include the scene in the film and anchor the film in Lincoln’s ideals because he felt the people of the world needed “a ringing statement of America’s democratic ideals.”⁶² This is an example of how this film, and Capra, advocate in favor of the American tradition of political individualism.

Capra’s support for the idea of self-development and the portrayal of the struggle between biblical/republican and utilitarian/expressive individualism is once again found in the personal conversions that occur in the film. Clarissa Saunders started her career in Washington with attitudes quite different from those displayed at the beginning of the film. She says: “When I came here, my eyes were big, blue question marks. Now they’re big, green dollar marks.”⁶³ The main goal in her life has become getting a lot of money and other goods. Her motivation for doing something is always her own personal benefit. She is selfish, cynical about the governing of society (even though she works for the government), and opportunistic in that she uses Longfellow Smith as a means when she “sells” him for baseball tickets to the reporters. Furthermore, she does not reveal the truth about the Willet Creek conspiracy to anyone, neither to Smith nor to the larger community, until she gets drunk (and has fallen in love with Smith), even though this should be both a legal and a moral obligation to her. Ethical and moral questions have been reduced to technical and practical issues, and she seems to live her life without any social responsibility. She can be said to represent the ideas of

utilitarian and expressive individualism. But Saunders is transformed by Smith and his ideals. Her conversion begins when they discuss his bill in the office, and appears to be well under way when she confesses to Moore: “I wonder, Diz, if this Don Quixote hasn’t got the jump on all of us. Wonder if it isn’t a curse to go through life wised up like you and me.”⁶⁴ She realizes that she has fallen in love with him, and that she has started believing in the ideals that he represents. When Smith starts doubting himself and his principles, she goes to him and convinces him that he *is* right and has been right all the time, because she believes in his ideals herself now. She says:

You can’t quit now. Not you. They aren’t all Taylors and Paines in Washington, that kind just throw big shadows, that’s all. You didn’t just have faith in Paine or any other living man. You had faith in something bigger than that. You had plain, decent, everyday common rightness, and this country could use some of that. Yeah, so could the whole cock-eyed world, a lot of it. Remember the first day you got here? Remember what you said about Mr. Lincoln? You said he was sitting up there waiting for someone to come along. You were right! He was waiting for a man who could see his job and sail into it, that’s what he was waiting for. A man who could tear into the Taylors and root them out into the open. I think he was waiting for you, Jeff. He knows you can do it. So do I.⁶⁵

She plans and supports him throughout his filibuster, and contacts his mother to gather support in his home state. She also gives him a note that says “Jeff – you’re wonderful. Press boys all with you. Read them Constitution next very slow. Diz says I’m in love with you. P.S. He’s right,” to keep Smith’s fighting spirits up. She now represents the same ideas as he does, and has gone from living a life in the utilitarian and expressive traditions to embracing the ideals of the biblical and republican traditions of individualism.

Joseph Paine used to work as a lawyer, defending the “little people” of the world. But after Smith’s father, his friend and editor of a small, idealistic newspaper, was killed by interests in a mining syndicate, Paine obviously chose a

new and different path. He apparently chose to become a part of Taylor's machine, by compromising his ideals and values, indeed, even his own integrity and identity.

He says to Smith that

[Y]ou've been living in a boy's world Jeff, and for heaven's sake, stay there. This is a man's world. It's a brutal world, Jeff, and you've no place in it, you'll only get hurt. ... You've got to check your ideals outside the door, like you do your rubbers. Now, thirty years ago, I had your [Smith's] ideals. I was you. I had to make the same decision you were asked to make today. And I made it. I compromised. ... I've had to compromise. I've had to play ball. You can't count on people voting.⁶⁶

He has grown more cynical and selfish, and at first does not hesitate to use Smith as another pawn in Taylor's game. His own personal benefit comes first, and he tries to push through corrupt legislation to make more money. He even lies and forges property deeds to oust Smith from the Senate. His ambivalence towards Taylor and the machine shines through, however, when Taylor comes to Washington to take care of business. "We can't do this to him. ... Jim, I won't stand for it. ... I don't want any part of crucifying this boy," he says to Taylor.⁶⁷ But Taylor threatens to ruin his career and his future (possibly as President, we are to understand), and convinces him to fall in line with his policy. Paine's final conversion comes after Smith's last appeal to him. He feels so guilty about his deceit and betrayal that he tries to commit suicide. He fails, however, and rushes into the Senate to tell everyone that "[I]t's a crime against the people who sent me here. And I committed it. Every word that boy said is the truth. Every word about Taylor and me and graft and the rotten political corruption in my state. Every word of it is true!"⁶⁸ He finally comes clean, and will hopefully return to his youth's idealism for good.

Jefferson Smith also goes through a kind of transformation. He is the archetypical idealist who, after he has been betrayed by the one he most trusted,

Paine, starts doubting himself and his ideals: “You sure had the right idea about me, Saunders. ... Just a simple guy, you said, still wet behind the ears. A lot of junk about American ideals. Yeah, they’re certainly a lot of junk, all right. ... What are you gonna believe in?”⁶⁹ Saunders lifts his spirits by pointing out that all great Americans who ever tried to do meaningful things and improve the conditions of society, including Lincoln, have had their Taylors and Paines to fight. Smith is able to overcome his doubts and learn how to express himself in the Senate in order to attain his goals. He understands that passive idealism is just as worthless as abject cynicism, and decides to fight with every fiber of his being to defend not only himself, but his ideals of honesty, morality, self-reliance, autonomy and “a little lookin’ out for the other fella,” the ideals that he feels to be the very foundation of America.

When it comes to issues of ethical and epistemological relativism, Raymond Carney takes an approach different from the one in his discussion about *Mr. Deeds* when he argues about *Mr. Smith* that it “teaches a viewer, however unfashionably, that there are real and important alternatives in life that are within our power as moral agents to decide between. Life is not all gray. There are absolute sides and issues and causes to be defended.”⁷⁰ I agree with this statement, as I find that Capra portrays the actions and values of Smith in such a way that they are meant to be seen as absolutely and objectively good and true. In *Smith*, as I argued he also did in *Deeds*, Capra resists the idea of ethical relativism. The autonomy that he provides his characters with is a moral freedom to act justly and righteously

towards other people. This is another element of this movie which proves that Capra is arguing in favor of the ideals of biblical and republican individualism.

Even though James Taylor is the leader of a rather impersonal machine, he is nonetheless an individual human being, and I find him to be a representative of some ideas and principles of utilitarian and expressive individualism, albeit an extreme one. His actions and thoughts illustrate what can happen if the ultimate consequences of the principles of these individualistic traditions are acted upon and lived out. He uses and controls people, governmental systems and the media to advance his own personal interests and does not seem to shun any means to achieve his goals. He buys the loyalty of people as though it was real estate, but he does not feel responsible for these people in any way. They are merely tokens in his game. He takes no interest in a just and healthy development and governing of society. All these attitudes and actions are quite the opposite of what Winthrop, Jefferson and Franklin would have approved of. Far more threatening and villainous than Cedar in *Mr. Deeds*, Taylor is an antagonist who does not necessarily ultimately lose the battle. He does not go through any kind of transformation or conversion in the course of the film. Nor are he and the machine defeated by Smith's filibuster and Paine's confession, as far as we know. The ending is darker and more ambiguous than in *Mr. Deeds*. The conflict is not resolved, and the bad guy is not punished. This highlights the fact that the philosophy of Taylor will always be an option for people. It will always be a possibility to choose egotism and cynicism. But the message of the movie that Capra wants to give his audience is that the principles of biblical and republican individualism must be cherished and fought for if necessary.

Chapter 4

Meet John Doe

Meet John Doe takes place in an unnamed metropolis around 1940. It opens as Ann Mitchell, a struggling journalist, gets fired from her job when a new managing editor, Connell, takes over the newspaper. She angrily writes her one last article about a fictional mythical idealist called John Doe who will commit suicide by jumping off the roof of city hall on Christmas Eve as a protest against the state of civilization and the trampling on “the little guy” by the leaders of society. Naturally, the city reacts strongly to this article, and both the mayor and the governor initiate searches to find him. When Mitchell tells her editor that John Doe does not exist, he wants to close the case, but she convinces him to make a series out of this fictional character. She gets her job back, and they pick out a vagabond to play the part of John Doe. The choice falls on Long John Willoughby, an ex-baseball player. He will get his damaged arm fixed and a train ticket out of town for portraying John Doe until Christmas Eve. Willoughby and his buddy, Colonel, are installed in a fancy hotel and provided with all sorts of luxury. Willoughby seems to adapt to this new lifestyle rather easily, whereas Colonel is far more critical. Meanwhile, Mitchell’s illustrated articles about John Doe’s protests and views on the world triple the circulation of the newspaper. But many people believe him to be a hoax, and more and more people demand to see and hear him live. Connell opposes this, but the owner of the paper, D.B. Norton, allows John to go on the radio. Mitchell has to write his radio speech, and gets a substantial raise from Norton. Mitchell never hides from the fact that she is only interested in the money,

not in the ideas of her fictional creation. Willoughby gets a \$5000 offer from a competing newspaper to tell the truth on the radio, but because of his feelings for Mitchell, he chooses to go on with the original plan. It is a fiery speech celebrating the common man, friendliness and the spirit of community. The ideas are all taken from Mitchell's father's diary, who was quite a philanthropist. But the speech and the enormously affectionate welcome it receives are too much for Willoughby, who proceeds to run away with Colonel. Nonetheless, John Doe fan clubs spring up everywhere. Mitchell and Norton track him down in a small town, Millville, but he is unwilling to go back with them. However, a surprise visit by the local John Doe club members telling their stories of how he has transformed their lives changes his mind, and he starts touring the country, lecturing and inspiring people from all walks of life. A major John Doe convention is planned by Norton, as Doe's popularity soars higher than ever. Meanwhile, Willoughby has started to truly believe in the ideas he is preaching, and Mitchell is also deeply affected. But then, at a dinner party, Norton tells her his real motive behind the convention. He wants John Doe to announce the formation of a third party with Norton as the presidential candidate. The dispirited Connell takes John out for a drink and tells him the truth. John does not believe him right away, so he goes to Norton's house, where Norton and a number of other tycoons, political bosses and society leaders are gathered to plan how they are going to take advantage of the convention. Willoughby, naturally, gets furious and threatens to expose their plans at the convention. Norton's counterthreat is to expose Willoughby as the phony he is. He nonetheless goes down to the convention, but without Mitchell, since he is still angry with her.

She and Connell are captured by Norton and put in jail. Before Willoughby gets the chance to speak to the crowds at the convention, however, he is pulled back by Norton's goons and exposed by Norton himself. He claims that the fake John Doe only wanted to keep the money for himself. He has no way of defending himself, as Norton's thugs cut the speaker wires, and he is booed off the stage. He runs off with Colonel, and goes through a long period of doubt and disbelief. On Christmas Eve, Willoughby prepares to jump off the roof of city hall, but he is stopped by Norton and then by Mitchell, who try to convince him to start the John Doe movement all over again. The John Doe club members he met when he ran away the first time also show up, and they try to convince him as well. At last, he is talked into starting over again, and the movie ends with Connell saying: "There you are, Norton, the people! Try and lick that!"⁷¹

I have shown that the conditions and the chances of prevalence for the principles of biblical and republican individualism and the protagonist who purveys them grew more complicated and more pessimistic from *Mr. Deeds* to *Mr. Smith*. In *Meet John Doe*, the last film in the so-called "populist trilogy," the situation is even bleaker and more sombre. The film opens with a shot of a worker with a pneumatic drill hammering off the inscription "Est. 1862 The Bulletin A free press means a free people" from the front of the newspaper building. This is replaced by a steel sign saying "The New Bulletin A streamlined paper for a streamline [sic] era." The year of *The Bulletin's* establishment is not insignificant. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln, one of America's foremost champions of liberty, was president. The inscription itself signifies that the newspaper wants to be an organ of freedom, and it promotes

autonomy. The new sign indicates that the new newspaper is not an advocate of freedom at all. It is in fact rather anti-individualistic, because it seems to promote conformism and denounce self-direction. A society that does not have freedom of the press (and/or speech) can never be the democratic, people-oriented republic that Jefferson and other thinkers in the republican individualistic strain sought to establish, because this kind of freedom is essential to maintain every individual's right to express its views and opinions.

Furthermore, in the beginning of the film, there are no idealistic characters who embody the ideals of biblical and republican individualism. No one seems to care about other people, it is every man for himself. Opportunism, cynicism, ruthlessness and moral relativism appears to be the norm. People are suspicious of others, and apparently do not trust anyone. The focus is on profit and material growth. Society is thoroughly characterized by Emerson's expressively individualistic idea of self-reliance, which says that we only deserve what we work for and that we are responsible only for ourselves. This is, however, what should be expected from characters like Ann Mitchell, who resembles Babe Bennett in *Deeds* and Clarissa Saunders in *Smith*, and editor Connell, who resembles MacWade in *Deeds*. But in *Meet John Doe*, even the protagonist, the "hero," is at first not imbued with idealism, integrity or social responsibility. He acts out of personal interest and concern, not out of the interest of the common good. Long John Willoughby goes along with the circulation stunt only to get his arm fixed and to make some money out of it. The Mitchell-written articles saying that John Doe protests against the collapse of decency in the world, corrupt local politics or

against the county hospital shutting its doors to the needy could not mean less to Willoughby. He is happy playing imaginary baseball and practicing his fishing techniques in his hotel room. And when Norton asks Mitchell what she wants, what her motivation is, she simply answers “money.”⁷² She deceives the newspaper and radio public to advance her own goals. She takes advantage of Long John Willoughby and his unfortunate situation, albeit openly, as opposed to Bennett’s and Paine’s concealed exploitations of Deeds and Smith. However, these characters are to change their dispositions in the course of the film. They go through a process of parallel maturation, which is different from that of the intersecting development in *Deeds* and *Smith*, where the Jean Arthur character in both films has the example of a Longfellow Deeds and a Jefferson Smith to live up to. But this possibility of intersection is impossible here, since neither Mitchell nor Willoughby are idealistic characters. Poague formulates it well when he says that “the problem is not one of becoming the kind of person you know you ought to be, but of discovering what you ought to be while in the process of becoming it.”⁷³ The two of them will eventually come to know and embrace the ideals of biblical and republican individualism.

The first hint we get of an idealistic personality in the film is when Beany, the newspaper assistant, says to Connell: “Hey, but the biggest thing I didn’t tell ya. Her [Mitchell’s] old man is Doc Mitchell, you know the doc who saved my mother’s life and wouldn’t take any money for it.”⁷⁴ Her father has been dead for many years, which is very important to remember in this context. If he is dead, perhaps his ideals belong to a time long gone, too. Perhaps the age of biblical and

republican individualism is over. This possibility paints the situation even blacker.

A very important early segment of the film nonetheless indicates that there is hope for the thoughts of biblical and republican individualism. When Mitchell is trying to write the radio speech for John Doe, her mother comes in and asks for some money. Mitchell wants to know what it is for, and it becomes clear that her mother spends a lot of money helping other people and families in their neighborhood.

- Yeah, I know. What are you looking for?
- Your purse. I need ten dollars.
- What for? I gave you fifty just the other day.
- Yes, I know dear, but Mrs. Burke had her baby yesterday, nine pounds, and there wasn't a thing in the house, and then the Community Chest lady came...
- And the fifty's all gone, huh? Who's the ten for?
- The Websters.
- The Websters!
- You remember those lovely people your father used to take care of. I thought I'd buy them some groceries. Oh, Ann dear, it's a shame those...
- You're marvellous, Ma. You're just like Father used to be. Do you realise a couple of weeks ago we didn't have enough to eat ourselves?
- Yes, I know dear, but these people are in such need, and we have plenty now.⁷⁵

The scene establishes that both Ann Mitchell's mother and her late father represent the ideals of biblical and republican individualism. They took their social responsibility very seriously, and cared about other people in a profound and ethical way. Later in the scene, when Mitchell is stuck on the speech she is writing, her mother suggests that she uses some of her father's old diary notes for inspiration. She takes the advice, and the speech is finished in due time.

The radio speech appears to be a turning point for both Mitchell and Willoughby. Before the broadcast, she comes in to wish him good luck, and tells him that she has fallen in love with the John Doe she has created, and that he turned out to be a wonderful person. She has incorporated her father's views on values and

society in the speech, and she has started to be affected by and believe in these views. She goes on, saying:

If you'll just think of yourself as the real John Doe. Listen, everything in that speech is things a certain man believed in. He was my father, John, and when he talked, people listened. And they'll listen to you, too. Funny, you know what my mother said the other night? She said to look into your eyes, and I'd see Father there.⁷⁶

Not only has she started to fall in love with the ideals of her father and the ideals of the constructed John Doe, she is also falling in love with Long John Willoughby as a potential idealist, as she imagines that he will become the kind of idealist that her father was. The fact that he reads her speech instead of the speech from *The Chronicle* is an indication that he has started to fall in love with her, too, even though he has not yet begun to believe in the ideals that he profess. The speech itself is a tribute to the common man and tells the story of how "he" has contributed to the course of history. It is a plea for a more communal spirit:

But we've all got to get in there and pitch. We can't win the old ball game unless we have team work. And that's where every John Doe comes in. It's up to him to get together with his teammate, and your teammate, my friend, is the guy next door to you, your neighbor. He's a terribly important guy that guy next door. You're gonna need him, and he's gonna need you. So look him up. If he's sick, call on him. If he's hungry, feed him. If he's out of a job, find him one. To most of you, your neighbor is a stranger, a guy with a barking dog and a high fence around him. Now, you can't be a stranger to any guy that's on your own team. So tear down the fence that separates you. Tear down the fence and you'll tear down a lot of hates and prejudices. Tear down all the fences in the country and you'll really have teamwork. ... The meek can only inherit the Earth when the John Does start loving their neighbors.⁷⁷

Again, I find that Capra uses rather obvious Biblical allusions, this time to *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 5, verse 5,⁷⁸ and chapter 25, verses 34-40,⁷⁹ as well as chapter 22, verses 34-40, mentioned in the discussion of *Smith*. All these allusions provide evidence that the ideals that Mitchell has put into the speech are of the biblical individualistic strain. Her father's idea of success was one of a healthy community inhabited by ethical people who take care of each other.

However, the content of the speech and the reception it receives overwhelm Willoughby, and he runs away. He is not ready to believe in the ideas he has just proclaimed.

His meeting with the members of the Millville John Doe club changes his mind, and he accepts Mitchell's and Norton's offer to go on a national lecturing tour, even though he is not entirely convinced about the truth of his speeches. He accepts this offer mostly for Mitchell's sake. But the extensive touring and the effect his speeches have on people start transforming him. Poague claims that he "grows from a self-centered child to a person maturely concerned with his responsibility towards others."⁸⁰ Evidence of this comes when they talk in the restaurant about how many people he has talked to since they started. Both his previous ignorance of his social responsibility and his growing awareness of it are clearly expressed in this scene, when he says:

Oh yeah, I heard 'em a million times too [the principles he lectures], but, there you are, maybe they're like me, just beginning to get an idea what those things mean. I never thought much about people before. They were always just somebody to fill up the bleachers. The only time I worried about 'em is if they ... is when they didn't come in to see me pitch. You know, lately I been watching 'em when I talk to 'em. I could see something in their faces. I could feel that they were hungry for something, you know what I mean? Maybe that's why they came. Maybe they're just lonely and wanted somebody to say hello to. I know how they feel. I've been lonely and hungry for something practically all my life.⁸¹

The hunger he speaks of is spiritual hunger, as he longs for something that is meaningful and substantial, and he has begun to find it in the ethics and values of his speeches.

The final maturation of both Willoughby and Mitchell becomes apparent when he goes to Norton's house to find out if Connell's accusations of Norton wanting to form a third party with himself as the Presidential candidate are true. He

finds out that they are indeed true, and he believes Mitchell to be a part of the conspiracy. He asks her if she wrote the speech, and when she answers “yes,” all his illusions are shattered but one, his newly found faith in the principles and ideas of “John Doe-ism.” Norton makes it clear, however, that unless Willoughby lets him and his fellow influential conspirators use the John Doe movement to their benefit, they will destroy it. He refuses to let Norton take advantage of the movement in this way, and fiercely challenges Norton: “Well, you go ahead and try. You couldn’t do it in a million years with all your radio stations and all your power, because it’s bigger than whether I’m a fake. It’s bigger than your ambitions, and it’s bigger than all the bracelets and fur coats in the world.”⁸² Mitchell then chimes in “You bet it is, John.”⁸³ She earlier claimed to have had no idea what had been going on, perhaps because she had been ignoring Norton’s real intentions. But now she most definitely knows, and she has to make a moral choice between Willoughby and Norton. She chooses Willoughby, which is the final evidence that she has fully awakened to her responsibility and truly believes in the ideals that her father preached and that she has been putting into John’s speeches.

Nonetheless, both of them find out that ideals and principles must be fought for with full knowledge of the opposition. Norton *is* able (at least temporarily) to destroy the John Doe movement, as he exposes Willoughby as the fraud he is at the convention. People at the convention immediately dismiss John Doe and the ideas as “just another racket.” Willoughby goes through a period of doubt and disillusionment, and he considers committing suicide on Christmas Eve. Like Deeds and Smith, he feels betrayed by the people he trusted most, and he feels that

the ideals he has come to learn and believe in are without a chance in this world of selfishness, cynicism and moral relativism. He feels that suicide is the only act of sincerity he has left to choose, and feels that it would justify his lies and deceit of the past. He also believes that his death will lead to the resurgence of the John Doe clubs. However, his suicide would probably have been hushed up by Norton, and would have had little or no impact on the former members of the John Doe clubs. It is important that he stays alive, if the ideas of biblical and republican individualism are going to stand a chance. Central to saving Willoughby is to make him aware that Mitchell has not, in fact, betrayed him, as she has also been deceived, and to reawaken his social responsibility. When Willoughby goes to the roof of city hall to jump, he is confronted by Norton and his gang, who try to talk him out of committing suicide. He is not convinced by Norton to call it off, but then Mitchell comes running to stop him. She says that she loves him, and that the two of them can start the movement all over again, honestly this time. Seemingly still not entirely talked out of taking his own life, John does not answer her. When the members of the Millville John Doe club come to the roof, she makes a final appeal to him:

Oh, John, if it's worth dying for, it's worth living for. ... Well, you don't have to die to keep the John Doe idea alive. Someone already died for that once, the first John Doe and He's kept that idea alive for nearly two thousand years. It was He who kept it alive in them [the Millville John Doe club members] and He'll go on keeping it alive forever and always. For every John Doe movement these men kill, a new one will be born. That's why those bells are ringing, John, they're calling to us, not to give up, but to keep on fighting, to keep on pitching.⁸⁴

Ann Mitchell's reference to the coming of Christ and His importance to the creed of the John Doe movement again shows that its ideals are part of the biblical individualistic tradition. After Mitchell stops speaking, she collapses into John's

arms. Then the Millville John Does beg him not to commit suicide, because even though they have decided to start the club up again, it would be so much easier with him alive. John takes a long, hard look at Norton and his gang, and decides not to jump and goes down with his friends. If he has the slightest doubt about not jumping before he looks at Norton, this look confirms his decision to live and continue the struggle against the evil forces of the world. It is his social and moral responsibility that ultimately convinces Willoughby to stay alive and continue the fight. Poague claims that there is

an almost ritualistic formality to this final sequence. Characters embody responsibilities, ideals, and principles (both good and bad), and the final dancelike movement sees John, with Ann in his arms, and the John Does, departing as a community of responsibility ... Growing up in *Meet John Doe* can therefore be seen as a matter of awareness and acceptance: being aware of evil in the world and accepting the responsibility of each individual to combat evil; being aware that the lack of responsibility breeds hatred and isolation and accepting the responsibility to combat ignorance and the forces that prey on ignorance with self-aware determination and Christ-like compassion.⁸⁵

That the individual must grow up by accepting and acting upon his or her social and ethical responsibilities, is the message of the film. This message strongly resonates with the biblical and republican individualistic traditions' understanding of success and freedom. I find it rather uncontroversial, then, to claim that the movie argues in favor of biblical and republican individualism.

The character of the Colonel must also be discussed in this context. Capra has a certain admiration for the Colonel's free-wheeling, individualist personality. The Colonel is indeed self-reliant and appreciates his freedom more than anything, and he opposes the greedy capitalism of the society he lives in, which is also something that Capra approves of. However, the Colonel is far too extreme in his individualism, and can hardly be said to be a representative of any of the four

individualistic traditions I have outlined. He does not care about (in fact he strongly rejects) accumulation of wealth or goods, nor is he particularly interested in cultivating and expressing himself, so he is not a utilitarian or an expressive individualist. He does not feel any social responsibility, and he is not interested in contributing to the development and governing of society, which excludes him from the biblical and republican traditions. His pessimistic and cynical view of life and society is in its foundation anti-social, anti-relational and anti-committing. “Trying to improve the world by jumping off buildings! You couldn’t improve the world if the buildings jumped on you,” he says.⁸⁶ Willoughby then says (to Mitchell): “Don’t mind the Colonel. He hates people.”⁸⁷ The Colonel does not like the present state of the world, but he is unwilling to do anything to change it. “I don’t read no papers, and I don’t listen to radios either. I know the world’s been shaved by a drunken barber, and I don’t have to read it,” he says.⁸⁸ He does not want to be tied to anyone or anything in any way, and he apparently wishes to live his life completely outside of the system of society. Wolfe claims about the Colonel that

it is his special function to articulate the degree to which the oppositions that structure a conventional melodrama – ambition versus self-sacrifice, acquisition versus charity, cynicism versus innocence, exploited versus exploiter – are all part of a system of relations, each term dependent on the other, which constitutes a social trap. The Colonel refuses to distinguish between the schemes of Norton and the dreams of the people, between Ann as hustler and Ann as visionary. His counter-proposition is an escape from romance, an escape from neighborhoods, and an escape from the binding force of the media.⁸⁹

In this analysis, we find the core of Colonel’s problem, which is that he thinks of every social relation, every human interaction as a “trap.” He is not converted by the John Doe movement and its biblical/republican ideas, he does not “grow up” to accept his responsibility. The attitudes and dispositions of the Colonel and the

people who feel like him can thus be said to represent another oppositional force that Willoughby and Mitchell and the others will have to struggle with.

In the discussion of the two previous movies, I have sketched how the protagonist representative of biblical and republican individualism had to struggle with two kinds of representatives of utilitarian and expressive individualism. On the one hand, there were the moderate ones, who would eventually be converted due to influence of the protagonist (Bennett, Saunders and Paine), on the other hand, there were the more extreme ones, the villainous antagonists, who would not be converted (Cedar and Taylor). The tendency of development, as I have shown, is that the situation has grown more pessimistic, and in *Meet John Doe*, the protagonist is at first a moderate representative of some ideas of utilitarian and expressive individualism himself. The villains have also become increasingly threatening and more extreme with each film. However, it would probably be far-fetched to call D. B. Norton a representative of utilitarian and expressive individualism. He is more properly classified as a fascist, a totalitarianist, in other words, as an opponent of all kinds of individualism. "We're coming to a new order of things. There's too much talk going on in this country. Too many concessions have been made. What the American people need is an iron hand. Discipline!," Norton says.⁹⁰ He is clearly portrayed as an opponent of autonomy, self-reliance and political individualism. Considering that society otherwise is strongly influenced by some of the principles of utilitarian and expressive individualism, perhaps what Capra intends to say is that an ideology like fascism is able to thrive

and possibly gain acceptance only when society is marked enough by these principles.

In *Deeds*, the protagonist's victory over the antagonists was undisputed and total. In *Smith*, the victory of the protagonist was far more ambiguous and incomplete. In *Meet John Doe*, if it is appropriate to use the term victory at all, it is even more oblique and unfulfilled than in *Smith*. Estrin says that "[I]t is the irony of this trilogy that although Capra's heroes fight the same battle for individual liberty, the outcome of each battle and the hope which may be taken from that battle becomes more nebulous with each succeeding film."⁹¹ The abhorrent truth about Jim Taylor and his machine was at least exposed in *Smith*, even if he was not punished (to our knowledge). D. B. Norton is not converted nor defeated in any way. Even though he does not become President, he does not lose any of his power or wealth. But it is not an ending entirely without hope, either. Willoughby, Mitchell, Connell and the Millville John Does have realized that the principles and ideals they have come to know and believe in must be fought for. They understand that America can only survive as a healthy, successful nation if people start living by the principles of biblical and republican individualism, and they are ready to do what it takes to withstand the oppositional forces.

Chapter 5

It's a Wonderful Life

It's a Wonderful Life takes place in a small town called Bedford Falls from 1919-1945. It begins with a lot of prayers being sent up to heaven about a man named George Bailey, who is apparently in some sort of trouble. Angels start talking about him, and an angel called Clarence gets the assignment of helping him out. First, Clarence must get to know Bailey better, and so his life is portrayed retrospectively. As a boy, he saves his brother, Harry, from drowning. He stops druggist Gower from poisoning a patient, and he wants to be an explorer when he grows up. His father owns the Bailey Bros. Building & Loan company, which is constantly under the threat of being put out of business by Mr. Potter, the county's richest and meanest man. When he is a grown man and about to leave Bedford Falls for Europe and then college after having worked at the Building & Loan for some years, his father asks him if there is any chance of him coming back to work for the Building & Loan after college. But George says that he wants to explore the world and build large buildings, bridges and skyscrapers. The same night, he goes to Harry's graduation party, where he meets Mary Hatch again, a girl who has had a crush on him her entire life. He walks her home, and they fall in love with each other. Then suddenly, George's uncle tells him that his father has had a stroke, and George feels compelled to stay home to take care of the business, and his brother goes to college instead. When Harry comes back, he surprises them all by introducing them to his wife, and he says that he will not take over the Building & Loan after all, which was the original plan. Later that night, George visits Mary, who has just come home

from college. He is very rude to her and does not show any affection for her, but when his rival Sam Wainwright (who lives the kind of life George wants to live) calls, George is eventually not able to suppress his love for her any more and they get married. They are about to leave for their honeymoon when a crisis arises at the Building & Loan which forces them to spend all their savings in order to solve it. So instead of going on a fancy vacation, they have to spend their wedding night in an old, abandoned house, into which they later move. The Bailey Building & Loan successfully keeps on helping the less fortunate people of Bedford Falls get a decent house to live in, and this frightens Potter somewhat. He offers George a well-paying job in his company, but George turns it down, even though he is obviously tempted. As the years pass, Mary has four children and spends her days redecorating their house, and George spends his days and evenings working. World War II breaks out, and Harry Bailey becomes a great war hero. George's bad ear stops him from joining the army, but he has his hands full with war duty in his home town. Then, on Christmas Eve, something terrible happens. George's absent-minded uncle Billy loses \$8000 in Potter's bank, and this pushes George over the edge. If the money is not found, this will mean the end of Bailey Building & Loan and the imprisonment of George and Billy. George rushes home and treats his family terribly without explaining why. He then goes to Potter (who has the money) and asks for help, but Potter merely makes fun of him and calls the police to have him arrested. More and more frustrated and desperate, George finally decides to take his own life (since his life insurance will provide the family with the money they need) by jumping off a bridge. But Clarence, who by now has entered the

present of the film's narrative, jumps into the water before him, and George jumps to save Clarence. Once ashore, Clarence tells George that he is an angel, but George does not believe him, saying that he wishes he had never been born. Clarence fulfills his wish, but George does not believe it at first. Only after he has met a lot of people who do not recognize him, including Mary and his own mother, does he realize that he is experiencing what Bedford Falls would have been like without him. And he understands that he has had a rich, valuable, meaningful, influential and important life, as the "Pottersville" he now witnesses is a terrible place, reminiscent of a miniature Babylon and all the people he loves are unhappy, lonely and distrustful. George prays to God to have his wish undone, and he runs home, happier than ever before. Everyone in town helps George pay the money he owes, and all charges against him are dropped. His brother Harry comes home and makes a toast to George, "the richest man in town."

Probably more than any of Capra's other films, *It's a Wonderful Life* concentrates on the importance and the supreme value of the individual and the importance of the individual's contribution to the common good. Capra says that it was "[A] film to tell the weary, the disheartened, and the disillusioned ... that *no man is a failure!* ... that *each man's life touches so many other lives*. And that if he isn't around it would leave an awful hole."⁹² He later said that "in a sense, it epitomises everything I've been trying to do and trying to say in the other films. ... The importance of the individual is the theme that it tells. And that no man is a failure."⁹³ The ideas that every person is worth the same and that every person matters are central points of biblical individualistic ideology, contributed by the

Judeo-Christian religious and cultural traditions of Western society, which provides evidence that Capra wanted to anchor the film in the principles of this individualist tradition.

This is most certainly apparent in the film, for example when Clarence tells George: “Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”⁹⁴ George Bailey is the film’s protagonist, and he is a character who represents the ideals of biblical and republican individualism. He is a self-reliant businessman who appreciates and values autonomy, and he takes care of and participates in the development of his community. He believes that success is a society of ethical people who are involved in and feel responsible for each other’s lives and fortunes. He refuses to let Potter rule the town and its inhabitants. But unlike Deeds and Smith, who despite their eventual doubts were rather one-dimensional characters, Bailey is a man of ambivalence and doubts throughout the film. He is Capra’s most fully realized, three-dimensional character, and is imbued with a large variety of human traits and feelings. He is no saint, on the contrary, he is an ordinary man who experiences grief, bitterness and sadness as well as joy and happiness. Time and time again, he must assert and reassert his values and ideals.

More than the other films discussed, *Wonderful Life* explores the inner life of its protagonist. There is a constant internal psychodrama concerning Bailey’s personality in the film. He wants to live up to the self-sacrificing ideal of conduct represented by his father, whose altruistic slogan, “All you can take with you is that which you’ve given away,” is typed on a plaque and hung on the wall of his office.

However, George also wants to live the life of his imagination and desires, as Violet Bicks and Sam Wainwright do. He wants to leave Bedford Falls and go out into the “big world” to build skyscrapers, bridges and railroads. When they are children, George tells Mary about his dream to become an explorer, and when they throw stones at the old ramshackle house, George tells Mary

I know what I’m gonna do tomorrow and the next day and next year and the year after that. I’m shaking the dust of this crummy, little town off my feet, and I’m gonna see the world. Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Colosseum. And then I’m coming back here and go to college and see what they know. And then I’m gonna build things. I’m gonna build airfields, I’m gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high, I’m gonna build bridges a mile long...⁹⁵

However, over and over George feels compelled to compromise these dreams in order to live up to his ideals. He is even ambivalent about marrying Mary Hatch, the girl he loves, because he knows it will infringe on his autonomy, and he knows that it will tie him to Bedford Falls. This ambivalence is something that he must deal with all through the film.

The continuous threat to Bailey’s identity and his values is most clearly personalized in Potter, who in many ways is a reversed reflection of Bailey. They have approximately the same job and function in the community, yet they are on the opposite sides of the scale of caring for this community. Potter is an antagonist who embodies the ultimate unhealthy consequences of acting upon some of the principles of utilitarian and expressive individualism. He does not feel any responsibility towards the community, and he has grown selfish and apathetic. His object in life is to gather as much money for himself as possible, even though he has no way of spending all of it. Moral issues have become technical and practical matters to him, and he uses his freedom to his own benefit and desires, not to that which is good, just and honest. When George as a young boy enters his father’s

office, Potter is there and quarrels with his father. Peter Bailey asks for an extension on his loan, but Potter says that he should foreclose the mortgages of his clients to get money to pay the installments on his loan. Peter says he will not do that, as his clients are families with children. “They’re not my children,” Potter answers.⁹⁶ This reply is strongly reminiscent of this passage from Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”: “Then again, do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor?”⁹⁷ This similarity provides evidence that Potter, like Emerson, ultimately feels no responsibility for other people. It is also significant to remember that Potter has been a constant, long-term force of opposition to George, which makes this relationship different from the relationships between the protagonists and the antagonists of *Deeds*, *Smith* and *Doe*.

George’s first compromising of his dreams comes when his father dies, and the board decides to give the company to Potter unless George takes over as executive officer. Even though he is supposed to leave for college, he reluctantly agrees to the deal because he knows that Potter will ruin the lives of the people of Bedford Falls otherwise. He furiously says to Potter:

Why, in the twenty-five years since he [Peter Bailey] and uncle Billy started this thing, he never once thought of himself, isn’t that right, uncle Billy? ... But he did help a few people get out of your slums, Mr. Potter. ... Just remember this Mr. Potter, that this rabble you’re talking about, they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn’t think so. People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they’re cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you’ll ever be.⁹⁸

The quotation clearly shows that George Bailey admires the ideals of his father and strongly cares about the welfare of his community. It is his deeply felt commitment

to the people of this community that convinces him to stay home instead of going to college. George feels compelled to compromise his dreams once more when his brother Harry comes home from college. Originally scheduled to take over George's job at the Building & Loan after returning home so George can go to college, Harry surprises everyone by revealing that he has been married and promised a job by his new father-in-law. Once again George must shelve his plans of going to school and becoming an engineer.

Later that night, George takes a walk, half-intentionally ending up in front of Mary Hatch's house. She has just returned from college. She loves George and wants to marry him, and George loves her, too. However, he is very ambivalent about marrying her. He knows that if they get married, he will lose even more of his freedom, and he will never be able to leave Bedford Falls. Marriage will be the last nail in the coffin of his dreams. After subjecting Mary to a rather unpleasant visit, George states a kind of declaration of independence: "Now you listen to me! I don't want any plastics and I don't want any ground floors! And I don't want to get married ever to anyone. You understand that? I wanna do what I wanna do! And you're... And you're..."⁹⁹ He becomes unable to suppress his love for her any more, and they embrace, and later they get married. George is finally willing to sacrifice his autonomy, his complete control over himself, for the woman he loves. They plan to go on a long, luxurious honeymoon to New York and Bermuda with the money they have saved up, but they suddenly discover that a crisis has arisen at the Building & Loan. This incident takes place in 1932, the hardest year of the Depression. The bank has called the company's loan, and Billy Bailey has given all

of their cash to the bank. The bank has closed down, but Potter has guaranteed the bank sufficient funds to meet their needs, so it will reopen in a week. People now want to cash out the money they have invested in the Building & Loan, but this is a problem, since Billy has given all the company's cash to the bank. Potter offers them fifty cents for every dollar they have spent on Building & Loan shares, and they appear tempted to take this offer. George appeals to their spirit of community, by saying that "I beg of you not to do this thing. If Potter gets hold of this Building & Loan, there'll never be another decent house built in this town. ... Now, we can get through this thing all right. We've got to stick together, though, we've got to have faith in each other."¹⁰⁰ Although people agree with these thoughts, they nonetheless need money to live, to buy food, and to pay their bills. Mary then suggests that they use the money they have been saving for their honeymoon. Yet again, George chooses to sacrifice something of his own in order to ensure a happy, healthy future of the people he cares about.

A crucial scene in the film comes a few years after their wedding. George and Mary lead a happy life, but George is nonetheless somewhat jealous of Sam Wainwright and his success and feels a little frustrated with his common, unadventurous life. Meanwhile, Potter is starting to get anxious about the success of the Bailey Bros. company, and decides to offer George a job. It is significant to observe that Potter does not really have to pressure or intimidate him in order to threaten George's ideals and self-preservation. In fact, he only needs to remind him of his own doubts and personal conflicts. Carney claims that "[I]t is not accidental that halfway through the movie Potter's most threatening gesture to George is not

an attempt to destroy him but an offer to merge with him...”¹⁰¹ Potter, in his office, assesses George as

an intelligent, smart, ambitious young man, who hates his job, who hates the Building & Loan almost as much as I do. A young man who has been dying to get out on his own ever since he was born. A young man, the smartest one in the crowd, mind you, a young man who has to sit by and watch his friends go places because he’s trapped, yes sir, trapped into frittering his life away playing nursemaid to a lot of garlic eaters.¹⁰²

It is evident that George feels that Potter describes his feelings rather well. Potter then proceeds to offer George a three-year contract at \$20,000 a year with occasional business trips to New York and Europe. Obviously very tempted by this proposition, George says that he knows he should take the offer, but asks for twenty-four hours to think about it. However, after he has shaken hands with Potter, he understands that he does not need any time to think about it. “I don’t need twenty-four hours, I don’t have to talk to anybody. I know right now, and the answer’s no! No! Doggone it! You sit around here and you spin your little webs, and you think the whole world revolves around you and your money. Well, it doesn’t, Mr. Potter!,” he answers.¹⁰³ George Bailey resists the offer because he knows that it will involve surrendering his principles and values, and it will in all likelihood mean the end of a just, successful Bedford Falls. By declining Potter’s temptation, he is able to maintain his biblical-republican individuality and path of self-direction throughout the film, and to continue to fight for his ideals.

Nothing, however, is more threatening to George Bailey and his ideals than the narratively “present” situation of the film, in which he wants to commit suicide because he feels that he is worth more dead than alive. The missing \$8,000 is the last in a long line of hardships, difficulties and disappointments that George has had to put up with. He feels fed up with everything, and starts to think that his whole

life has been meaningless and that people would have been better off without him. Bailey's phase of self-doubt is more extreme than the ones Deeds and Smith underwent. It can be compared to Willoughby's phase of self-doubt, since he also considered committing suicide. However, that would have been an act of principle, whereas Bailey's would have been an act of desperation and culminated frustration. George Bailey has lived his whole life in a world of compromise, of conflict between imagination and desire on the one hand and reality and practicality on the other. It has not been the life he pictured and wished for when he was younger. When George goes to see Potter for help, Potter reminds him that he once called him a "warped, frustrated old man," and now calls George a "warped, frustrated young man, a miserable little clerk crawling in here on your hands and knees and begging for help."¹⁰⁴ Maland claims about George's present state of mind that

[T]hough George, in contrast to Potter, has repressed the selfish desires of his ego, he is just as frustrated in his own way as the atomistic and greedy Potter and remains so until he realizes the positive and lasting contribution he has made to his family and community. Only the fantasy sequence, in which George sees what life would be like had he not lived, and the final sequence, when the community repays George for his altruism, resolve George's internal and external conflicts.¹⁰⁵

I agree with Maland's statement. It is only after George has seen how Bedford Falls would have been without him, that he learns to understand that the life he has led is not an inferior way of life. As he finds out in the sequence of the film where he experiences how the town would have been if he had not been born, his life has had a tremendously positive impact on other people. He has saved his brother from drowning (who in turn saved an entire boat of soldiers in the war); prevented Gower from poisoning a patient, going to jail and becoming a drunk; and kept his Uncle Billy from losing the company and going insane. But most profoundly and

comprehensively, he has kept the town from becoming the den of sin, crime, corruption and general unhappiness that Pottersville would have been. He has felt like a failure because he has not travelled the world and built bridges, cities and skyscrapers like he wanted to, but instead he has contributed to the building of a strong community of independent, secure citizens who care about each other.

The ending of the film, in which everyone George has helped over the years contributes to help him out of the crisis, shows that the sacrifices he has chosen to make have not been in vain. People have been very thankful for them, and now at last, his good deeds are returned. The ending shows how grateful the people of the little community are to him, and that they value and appreciate him as an individual. He has done so much good for them, and now they can do something good for him. The causal relation that forms the foundation of this way of thinking is found in Christian social ethics, particularly the golden rule of *The Gospel According to Matthew* chapter 7, verse 12.¹⁰⁵ Capra's unquestionable approval of Christian social ethics shows that he denounces the ideas of ethical and epistemological relativism, as these two sets of ideas are opposites, and fortifies the film's argument in the biblical individualistic strain.

The film's apparently perfectly joyous ending may not be as unanimously happy-go-lucky as at first assumed. Even though George has gotten the money he needs for the company, Potter still has the \$8,000 that Billy lost, and he is not likely to give it back. He has not been "defeated" in any way, and will not be punished for his misdeed. In fact, he has been able to squeeze yet another sum of money out of this community for himself. This somewhat pessimistic element of the movie is

Capra's realistic way of saying that the Potters will always be around. There will always be people who do not feel responsible for others, and whose main interest is themselves. Furthermore, George's life situation has not changed significantly. He will probably still have to make sacrifices in order to live up to his ideals. But the important point that the movie tries to make is that he has learned to live with the limitations that exist. He knows that Potter and the ideas that he represents will continue to be around, but he understands that the fight for his principles is not in vain. Once again, Capra's ideal of "triumphing over one's environment" is expressed in the development of his protagonist.

It's a Wonderful Life also gives support for the idea of religious individualism. When George's friends and relatives pray in the beginning of the film, they don't act through intermediaries. Nonetheless, their prayers are undoubtedly heard and answered. Clarence is sent to Earth to show George what a wonderful and meaningful life he has had. George believes that the punch he received from Mr. Welch was the answer to his prayer, but Clarence tells him, "I'm the answer to your prayer. That's why I was sent down here."¹⁰⁷ The thought that prayers can be heard and answered, or more profoundly, the very idea that God and angels exist and can interact with human beings in this way, is a central part of Christian belief and theology, and its presence in the film proves that Capra wished to incorporate Christian principles and ideas in the film. And after George has said his own personal prayers ending with "[P]lease, God, let me live again,"¹⁰⁸ order is restored in his life. This element of the film shows how Capra believes that everyone must take responsibility for one's own religious life through the

establishment and nurturance of one's own personal relationship with God. It is evidence of his and the movie's approval of religious and biblical individualism.

Unlike *Mr. Deeds*, *Mr. Smith* and *Meet John Doe*, *It's a Wonderful Life* does not have a female character that initially takes advantage of the protagonist to advance her own goals. I have identified these characters as moderately embodying some of the principles of utilitarian and expressive individualism in regard to society. Mary Hatch Bailey, however, is nothing like Babe Bennett, Clarissa Saunders or Ann Mitchell. She is never a supporter of these principles in the first place, and therefore she never goes through any kind of transformation, there is no need for it. Mary apparently believes in the societal ideals of biblical and republican individualism all the time. It is significant to observe that she is not a passive character who believes in something without acting upon her beliefs. She is more than willing to make sacrifices and adjustments to make life better for others. It is she who suggests that they use their honeymoon money to help people out during the bank crisis, and she takes a very active part in serving the community of Bedford Falls and the larger community during World War II. She even seems to be more stable and more satisfied with the life she leads and more determined and secure about the importance and the positive effects of the ideas that she and George purvey and embody than he is, as she apparently does not feel ambivalent about her life situation at all.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The four movies I have examined in this thesis have all dealt with American individualism. Their protagonists have occupied themselves with individualistic themes like self-reliance, autonomy and political and religious individualism. But Capra has not portrayed them as “outside of” society. Nor have they been confined to dealing with one specific societal problem, like the prison system or organized crime. The Capra protagonists I have examined have had to express their individuality within a complex and encompassing society. Robert Sklar claims that “Capra was the only Hollywood director [in the 1930s and 40s] who tried to construct a large-scale model of American society in his films.”¹⁰⁹ In my opinion, Capra tried to give a complete guide, a profound answer, to the question of how individuals ought to live and interact through his films. His answer lies within the strains of American biblical and republican individualism.

The foundation of the societal philosophies of biblical and republican individualism is the idea that the individual has an objective (moral) duty to take care of him- or herself and his or her neighbors and to participate and actively take part in the governing and development of society. Success can only be achieved through a society of ethical and responsible individuals living *together*, not solely through subjective and personal fulfillment. The individual must “grow up” and accept its social responsibility and be willing to act upon and fight for the ideals he or she believes in. Longfellow Deeds, Jefferson Smith, John Willoughby and George Bailey all represent the ideals of biblical and republican individualism, even

though they live with these ideals differently. Deeds and Smith have believed in these ideals their entire lives, and after having doubted themselves and their ideals for a limited period of time, decide to continue fighting for them. Willoughby does not believe in these ideals at all when *Meet John Doe* begins, but he is gradually converted, and starts fighting passionately for them. Deeds, Smith and Willoughby eventually understand that their ideals are useless and dead unless they are ready to stand up for them and try to overcome the opposition that be. Bailey is a character who must struggle with his ambivalent feelings towards these ideals throughout the whole film, but who nonetheless chooses to live up to them time after time. His phase of ambivalence and doubts is longer and more profound than that of the others, but after his culminative episode of despair, he realizes that his struggle for the principles and values he believes in has been worth the sacrifices.

Capra uses a wide variety of means in order to position his films and protagonists within the traditions of biblical and republican individualism. He uses both explicit and subtle references to the Bible, and the social ethics of Christianity are portrayed as absolute ethical truth. Both Smith and Willoughby, who function as Capra's mouthpieces in their respective films, quote and/or allude to segments from the Bible in their speeches. Smith quotes *Matthew* 22, 39 and *1 Corinthians* 13, 13 in the Senate and Willoughby alludes to several passages of *Matthew*, and the John Doe creed is strongly indebted to the Christian faith, as is evidenced by Mitchell's speech in the final scene of *Meet John Doe*. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, the spiritual reality of God and angels and their interaction with the physical reality of humans play an integral part of the plot and are treated as given and undisputed

phenomena. It is important to observe that these interactions take place without intermediaries, which shows that Capra supports the American idea of religious individualism.

There are also several explicit and subtle references to the republican tradition of individualism. Deeds's plan to give away his twenty million dollars to two thousand unfortunate farmers can be described as being Jeffersonian, because it would have given them a renewed opportunity to take part in society as independent farmers. The name of the protagonist in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, Jefferson Smith, is a dual reference, both to the most prominent figure of American republicanism, Thomas Jefferson, and to the most common last name in America. This reference shows that like Jefferson, Capra believes that in the governing of a democracy, everyone is equally important and the contribution of every person is necessary. And with its constant references to Lincoln and other major figures of American politics and to the larger-than-life, symbolically important texts of national identity like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the film provides support for the archetypical American version of political individualism. The principles of John Willoughby and George Bailey are implicitly republican, since they emphasize and require the individual's involvement in both the smaller and the larger community.

The protagonists of these four movies all have to struggle with oppositional forces, both in the shape of systems and individuals. Their ideals of individual social involvement and responsibility are contrasted to the societal values of utilitarian and expressive individualism. Focusing solely on the development and

improvement of the self and the desires and needs of the single individual, followers of these latter strains of individualism believe that the individual does not have an objective responsibility for other people. There are two kinds of characters who embody these values. There are the moderate ones, who will eventually be converted by the influence of the protagonist. These include Babe Bennett, Clarissa Saunders, Joseph Paine and Ann Mitchell. Initially, their goal in life is to pursue their own advancement and they do not care or feel responsible about the common good. The influence of the protagonist transforms these characters into followers of biblical and republican individualistic ideals. There are also the rather extreme characters, the ones who act aggressively upon the ultimate consequences of these principles and who will not be converted. These include John Cedar, James Taylor and Henry Potter. These characters work vigorously to attain their own personal goals and wishes and they have no interest in maintaining or developing the common good of their communities. The protagonist's victory over these characters and their societal values grows more ambiguous from film to film. This tendency may appear pessimistic, but is more correctly interpreted as a realistic way of saying that these ideas and the people who believe in and act according to them will always be an oppositional force to the people who believe in and act upon the societal principles of biblical and republican individualism.

However, the utilitarian and expressive strains of individualism are not the only systems of thoughts that Capra finds to be in opposition to biblical and republican individualism. *Meet John Doe* presents two sets of ideas that are incompatible with the societal values and principles of both biblical and republican

and utilitarian and expressive individualism. One of them is the totalitarian, anti-individualistic fascism that D. B. Norton seems to represent. This ideology has no room for individual thought and expression, nor for values like self-reliance, autonomy and political and religious individualism. The other set of ideas is the anti-social, anti-commitment extreme individualism of the Colonel. It leaves the individual in absolute isolation with no hope of, nor interest in, becoming a part of something resembling a community. Both these sets of ideas are hostile enemies of biblical and republican individualism, Capra believes, and must be fought against.

Charles Maland says about Capra's films that they

do present "false Americanism," but only to reaffirm the values of "the ecumenical church of humanism," those Christian and American values which Capra inherited from the traditions of his culture and which he presented in such powerful narratives. When Capra most closely identifies sacred values with the symbol of America, he is centrally within the American grain...¹¹⁰

It is legitimate and necessary to ask why Capra's answer to the question of how individuals ought to live and interact is seemingly fully compatible with the values of biblical and republican individualism. I believe that he wanted passionately to make films that argued in favor of these individualistic traditions because it was his belief that the alternatives presented by the utilitarian and expressive individualistic strains would eventually lead to the downfall of America. I think that what Smith says in the Senate about the American nation is representative of the underlying basis of the ideology of all the movies I have discussed in this thesis:

I wouldn't give you two cents for all your fancy rules if, behind them, they didn't have a little bit of plain, ordinary kindness - and a little looking out for the other fella, too. That's pretty important all that. It's just the blood and bone and sinew of this democracy that some great men handed down to the human race, that's all!¹¹¹

If America and Americans lose, ignore or neglect their traditions of active citizenship, neighborliness and a profound feeling of responsibility for each other, they will also lose the most important and hardest to replace ingredient in the recipe for true American success. That is what Frank Capra wanted to tell his audience through his films. He wanted the people who saw his films to be affected by the ideas and to live out the ideals that these films present, because he felt deeply that living by the principles of biblical and republican individualism was the only way to ensure the survival of what he believed to be genuinely American.

In this thesis, I have analyzed how the American ideology of individualism and the individual's relation to society was depicted in the most popular and most critically acclaimed films of director Frank Capra. Within the research on the relationship between the American ideology of individualism and American motion pictures and the portrayal of it therein, many fields are still unexplored and could use further elaboration. It would be very interesting to analyze how the cinema of John Ford, Howard Hawks, Orson Welles and other major Hollywood directors in the 1930s and 1940s depicted the individual and its relation to society. Westerns, dramas, gangster films and *film noirs* of the period dealt a lot with individualism, and therefore demand analytical attention in this context. It would also be very interesting to see how other genres of American popular culture, like television series, comic books and popular music lyrics, have dealt with the theme of individualism. David E. Kelley's television series *Ally McBeal*, Don Rosa's graphic novel *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck* and the lyrics of R.E.M. are just a few contemporary examples of popular culture expression that need to be examined

and discussed in regard to individualism and the individual's relation to society. This is outside of the scope of this thesis, however, and it is thus left to others to undertake this scholarly work.

Notes

¹ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp xlii, 37-38; Lukes. 1973. pp 594-596

² Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 28-31

³ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 32-35, 55-56

⁴ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 55-56

⁵ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 56-58

⁶ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 2-3, 15, 37-38, 142-144, 162, 179, 275-296

⁷ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 23-25

⁸ Bellah. 1985/1996. p 25

⁹ Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 6-20, 75-81

¹⁰ Lukes. 1973. pp 599-602

¹¹ Lukes. 1973. pp 602-603

¹² Bellah. 1985/1996. pp 275-296

¹³ Shindler. 1996. p 73

¹⁴ Shindler. 1996. p 95

¹⁵ Girgus. 1998. pp 1-18; Karney. 2002. pp 212-305; Shindler. 1996. pp 1-95; Sklar. 1994. pp 161-246

¹⁶ Karney. 2002. pp 306-393; Sklar. 1994. pp 249-304

¹⁷ Capra. 1971. p 38

¹⁸ Katz. 1998. p 506: “gagman. A writer who specializes in the creation of jokes, visual as well as verbal. Gag writers were an essential part of the production team in the silent comedy era in Hollywood.”

¹⁹ Katz. 1998. p 64:

auteur theory. The theory that the director is the “author” of a film. The reasoning that leads to this conclusion is that a film is a work of art, and since a work of art is stamped with the personality of its creator, it is the director, more than anyone else, who gives the film its distinctive quality.

²⁰ Katz. 1998. p 217

²¹ Capra. 1971. p 196:

The little man sat opposite and quietly said: “Mr. Capra, you’re a coward.”

“A what?”

“A coward, sir, But infinitely sadder – you are an offense to God. You hear that man in there?” Max had turned on the radio in my room. Hitler’s raspy voice came shrieking out of it. “That evil man is desperately trying to poison the world with hate. How many can he talk to? Fifteen million – twenty million? And for how long – twenty minutes? You, sir, you can talk to *hundreds* of millions, for two hours – and in the dark. The talents you have, Mr. Capra, are not your own, not self-acquired. God gave you those talents; they are His gifts to you, to use for His purpose. And when you don’t use the gifts God blessed you with – you are an offense to God – and to humanity. Good day, sir.”

The little faceless man walked out of the room and down the stairs. In less than thirty seconds he had ripped me open with the truth: exposed the fetid pus of my vanities.

²² Capra. 1971. p 205

²³ Katz. 1998. p 273: “Harry Cohn was notorious for his ruthlessness and vulgarity. He ruled his studio like a despot, spying on employees through informers and a hidden-microphone system, hiring and firing at will, courting the strong and humiliating the weak.”

²⁴ Capra. 1971. pages 438, 440 and 444:

Because I felt a visceral fear: *State of the Union* would be my last Frank Capra film, my last burst of autumn colors before the winter of artistic slavery to the major studio hierarchy at Paramount Pictures. How ironic that I, who had started the cycle and beat the loudest tom-toms for the “one man, one film” principle, had probably negotiated the death of that glorious cycle – for cash!

...

Well, this satirist of pretensions, this Christian humanist, this critic of materialism, now gave substantial trust funds to his three children, moved into posh offices at Paramount Studios – and slowly drank the hemlock of champions: the bitter, souring realization that part of what had made him great was dying.

...

And so, the “one man, one film” apostle became, for the first time, an employed contract director taking orders. I was tempted by a million dollars – and fell; never to rise to be the same man again, either as a person or as a talent. For, one I had lost (or sold) control of the content of my films and of the artistic liberty to express myself in my own way – it was the beginning of my end as a social force in films.

²⁵ Capra. 1971. p 442

²⁶ McBride. 1992. p 163

²⁷ Carney. 1986. p 289

²⁸ Poague. 1994. p 261

- ²⁹ Sklar. 1994. p 210
- ³⁰ H.B. Warner, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ³¹ Capra. 1971. p 186
- ³² Gary Cooper, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ³³ McBride. 1992. p 340
- ³⁴ Gary Cooper, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ³⁵ Gary Cooper, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ³⁶ Carney. 1986. p 262
- ³⁷ John Wray, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ³⁸ Gary Cooper, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ³⁹ Estrin. 1980. pp 15-17; Maland. 1980. pp 91-93; Willis. 1974. pp 8-12
- ⁴⁰ Maland. 1980. p 96
- ⁴¹ Maland. 1980. p 91
- ⁴² Poague. 1975. p 177
- ⁴³ Poague. 1975. pp 170-171
- ⁴⁴ Jean Arthur, performer. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*
- ⁴⁵ Carney. 1986. p 282.
- ⁴⁶ Estrin. 1980. p 43
- ⁴⁷ Carney. 1986. p 289
- ⁴⁸ Carney. 1986. p 290-291
- ⁴⁹ Carney. 1986. p 292-293
- ⁵⁰ Carney. 1986. p 296

⁵¹ Immanuel Kant formulated the Categorical Imperative in three different ways in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785):

The first (Universal Law formulation): “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

The second (Humanity or End in Itself formulation): “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”

The third (Kingdom of Ends formulation) combines the two: “All maxims as proceeding from our own [hypothetical] making of law ought to harmonise with a possible kingdom of ends.”

⁵² Carney. 1986. p 303

⁵³ Carney. 1986. p 304

⁵⁴ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

⁵⁵ Estrin. 1980. p 55; Maland. 1980. p 107

⁵⁶ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

⁵⁷ Estrin. 1980. p 57-58

⁵⁸ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

⁵⁹ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

⁶⁰ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

⁶¹ The Gospel According to Matthew chapter 22, verses 34-40:

³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

⁶² Capra. 1971. p 260

⁶³ Jean Arthur, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

⁶⁴ Jean Arthur, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

- ⁶⁵ Jean Arthur, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
- ⁶⁶ Claude Rains, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
- ⁶⁷ Claude Rains, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
- ⁶⁸ Claude Rains, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
- ⁶⁹ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
- ⁷⁰ Carney. 1986. p 313
- ⁷¹ James Gleason, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁷² Barbara Stanwyck, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁷³ Poague. 1975. p 196
- ⁷⁴ Irving Bacon, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁷⁵ Barbara Stanwyck and Spring Byington, performers. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁷⁶ Barbara Stanwyck, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁷⁷ Gary Cooper, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁷⁸ *The Gospel According to Matthew* chapter 5, verse 5: ⁵[Jesus says:] “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.”
- ⁷⁹ *The Gospel According to Matthew* chapter 25, verses 34-40:
- ³⁴“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? ³⁸And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’”
- ⁸⁰ Poague. 1975. pp 197-199
- ⁸¹ Gary Cooper, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁸² Gary Cooper, performer. *Meet John Doe*

- ⁸³ Barbara Stanwyck, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁸⁴ Barbara Stanwyck, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁸⁵ Poague. 1975. pp 203-204
- ⁸⁶ Walter Brennan, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁸⁷ Gary Cooper, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁸⁸ Walter Brennan, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁸⁹ Wolfe. 1989. p 15
- ⁹⁰ Edward Arnold, performer. *Meet John Doe*
- ⁹¹ Estrin. 1980. p 63
- ⁹² Capra. 1971. p 383
- ⁹³ Frank Capra in “The Making Of *It’s a Wonderful Life*”
- ⁹⁴ Henry Travers, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ⁹⁵ James Stewart, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ⁹⁶ Lionel Barrymore, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ⁹⁷ Emerson. 1841. p 59
- ⁹⁸ James Stewart, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ⁹⁹ James Stewart, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ¹⁰⁰ James Stewart, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ¹⁰¹ Carney. 1986. p 381
- ¹⁰² Lionel Barrymore, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ¹⁰³ James Stewart, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ¹⁰⁴ Lionel Barrymore, performer. *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- ¹⁰⁵ Maland. 1980. p 143

¹⁰⁶ *The Gospel According to Matthew* chapter 7, verse 12: “[Jesus says:] ‘In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.’”

¹⁰⁷ Henry Travers, performer. *It's a Wonderful Life*

¹⁰⁸ James Stewart, performer. *It's a Wonderful Life*

¹⁰⁹ Sklar. 1994. p 209

¹¹⁰ Maland. 1980. pp 185-186

¹¹¹ James Stewart, performer. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Filmography

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Gary Cooper (Longfellow Deeds), Jean Arthur (Babe Bennett), George Bancroft (MacWade), Lionel Stander (Cornelius Cobb) and Douglas Dumbrille (John Cedar). Columbia, 1936.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart (Jefferson Smith), Jean Arthur (Clarissa Saunders), Claude Rains (Sen. Joseph Paine), Edward Arnold (Jim Taylor) and Guy Kibbee (Gov. Hubert Hopper). Columbia, 1939.

Meet John Doe. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Gary Cooper (Long John Willoughby), Barbara Stanwyck (Ann Mitchell), Edward Arnold (D. B. Norton), Walter Brennan (Colonel) and James Gleason (Henry Connel). Warner Bros, 1941.

It's a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart (George Bailey), Donna Reed (Mary Hatch/Bailey), Lionel Barrymore (Mr. Potter), Thomas Mithcell (Uncle Billy) and Henry Travers (Clarence Oddbody). Liberty, 1946.

"The Making Of *It's a Wonderful Life*". Produced and directed by Sandra Moiseeff. Hosted by Tom Bosley. With appearances by Frank Capra, James Stewart and Sheldon Leonard. Raycom, 1990.

"Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* A Personal Remembrance". Hosted by Frank Capra Jr. Featuring James Stewart and Frank Capra. Bexy Communications, Inc., 1991.

"Frank Capra Jr. remembers *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*". Produced and directed by Michael Gillis. Hosted by Frank Capra jr. Columbia Tristar, 1999.

"Frank Capra Jr. remembers *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*". Produced and directed by Michael Gillis. Hosted by Frank Capra jr. Columbia Tristar, 1999.

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